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Your red hot grand-
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A LOVELY DAY

Some BORZOI Novels
Fall, 1924.

THE TATTOOED COUNTESS
CARL VAN VECHTEN

THE FIRE IN THE FLINT
WALTER F. WHITE

THE LORD OF THE SEA
M. P. SHIEL

THE PEASANTS
LADISLAS ST. REYMONT

BALISAND
JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

SOUND AND FURY
JAMES HENLE

TREASURE TRAIL
ROLAND PERTWEE

WINGS
ETHEL M. KELLEY

THE TIDE
MILDRED CRAM

ORDEAL
DALE COLLINS

RED DAWN
PIO BAROJA

A LOVELY DAY

BY HENRY CÉARD

Member of the Goncourt Academy

Translated by
ERNEST BOYD



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PART ONE

PART ONE

IN the quarter where she lived Madame Duhamain's virtue was established above suspicion. The neighbouring housewives, who could see her from their windows coming and going in her apartment, doing her ironing, bottling her preserves and pickling her French beans, thought her rather too domesticated for her age, which was scarcely thirty. But there was a general disposition to agree with the charwoman who described her as "a decent body," because of the piece of bread and glass of wine which she received regularly every second Saturday, when she was kept after eleven o'clock in the morning washing the kitchen tiles with milk and cleaning out the copper pots.

"It is one of her perquisites," Madame Duhamain used to say.

For several streets around she was cited as an example for the way she made her clothes last by skilfully remodelling them, prolonging their life from one season to another. From the Boulevard de Reuilly to the Avenue de Saint-Mandé they sang praises of her good taste and her economy. She never looked dowdy, and even the most critical thought her in some respects rather chic. Conse-

quently on Sundays Monsieur Duhamain, the architect, was an envied husband when he went out walking with his wife, carrying the camp stool on which she used to rest in the Bois de Vincennes while she watched the shopkeepers playing innumerable games of bowls. She was a credit to him. The concierges who were seated by the edge of the path taking the air, the acquaintances who saluted them as they met—all repeated that this was a truly united couple. It was an admitted and indisputable fact. Yet, even Madame Duhamain had had her adventure, a very brief little romance, whose remembrance made her smile ironically, with a sort of pang of regret.

It all began at a ball to which her husband had consented to take her, at Maurice's establishment in the Avenue de Saint-Mandé, the Salon des Familles, a restaurant for wedding-parties and the dinners of friendly societies, where the youth of Bercy, chiefly wine agents, used to get up subscription dances at intervals during the winter.

As a rule the Duhamains led an economical and peaceful existence. Once a fortnight, on Sundays, they gave a family dinner-party, and played interminable games of cards, which were suddenly stopped about a quarter to twelve so that the guests could catch the last bus and get home without the expense of a cab. Sometimes, when big military reviews were held, and their curiosity lured them away out of Paris down to Longchamps, right in the opposite direction from their own neighbourhood, they would

decide to dine out rather than come home to find not a pot nor a dish washed. Then they would choose a cheap eating-house, preferably one of Duval's. The Palais Royal restaurants disgusted them ever since one evening when they were taking a stroll and caught a glimpse through a half-opened transom of the chefs in dirty caps putting the same sauce on every dish with a brush.

Their wildest dissipation never went beyond the *cafés-chantants*, with their green trellis-work enclosures. On starry summer nights they would sometimes wander around, catching here and there the fragments of a vulgar tune, and snatches of some raucous ditty. Between the branches they could just see the white shoulders of the singers and the sleeves of the men playing the bass fiddles whose scrolls rose above the dwarf clumps of rhododendrons, and follow in the light the tip of the conductor's baton beating a frenzied measure. They would go away quite satisfied, their eyes dazzled by the glare of flaming gas-jets burning in double rows beneath globes of unpolished glass.

By chance they would see the new plays at their two-hundredth performance, and they used to go the Comédie Française in August and September, when the house was papered with complimentary tickets, dreaming that one day they would see a real star. Their great ambition was to go to the Palais Royal. They wanted to see the famous Brasseur because he came from their part of the city. At least, that was what people said, people who ought to

know. But they were unwilling "to pay good money" for the pleasure, found the seats too expensive, declared that they were uncomfortable, protested against the rapacity of the box-office, and postponed the realization of their desire until one of their uncles from the country came on a visit to Paris. He would come and stay with them while the Exhibition was on, for a month, six weeks, as long as he liked—with him you could not raise any difficulties—and the least he could do would be to return their hospitality by some little attention, for example, a box booked in advance to avoid waiting in the queue, and situated right in front of the stage, for some night when they were playing Labiche's *La Cagnotte*.

Madame Duhamain's tastes were simple; she never complained of the monotony of her existence, for she found it natural. Every year on Easter Sunday, when the weather was fine, she put on a new dress, and her husband a white waistcoat and spats of the same colour. Arm in arm they would go through the Bois de Vincennes, and half a mile further on to Charenton, where they took the train to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges. There they climbed up to the parapet of the church and, completely out of breath, gazed at Paris, argued about the position of the important buildings, expressed amazement at finding the Panthéon so far to the right; they thought it was even further to the left. Afterwards they would return via Boissy-Saint-Léger, a long dusty walk. They were interested in the seeds which were beginning to sprout, they examined the fruit-trees

and became anxious about the harvest, fearing that the white frost might come along and blight everything in one morning. What a disaster that would be! They felt for the country as if it were their private property, and, as they calculated the probable losses of a catastrophe, they were as perturbed as a farmer, and as full of selfish anxiety as a landed gentleman.

Every now and then they would stop and peer through the railings enclosing some huge estate. Their eyes took in the perspective of green lawns, of dark avenues of lime-trees carefully trimmed, and they would declare that it was "a princely demesne," and then resume their walk.

They walked without taking one another's arm, one at each side of the road, on the border, because there worn grass grew which was restful to the feet. Intoxicated by the fresh air and expanding in the sun, they gradually began to indulge in ecstasies and dreams of independence. When, oh, when would they be their own masters? But, rapidly descending to more immediate joys, they would remark how freely one breathed, and draw deep breaths to make sure that their lungs were working properly, congratulating themselves upon the excellent quality of the ham they had eaten at breakfast that morning. It was a ham which Madame Duhamain had cooked herself in a handful of hay kindly given to her by a grain-merchant near by, and which was very different from the ham sold by the pork-butcher. Madame Duhamain remarked that they always had a

ham from her father about that time of year. Whereupon her husband replied that with ham, butter and small white turnips, one would live better than at Véfour's for twenty-five francs per person. He added a few kind words about his wife's family, especially about his father-in-law's house, which he regarded as a truly patriarchal establishment.

Monsieur Duhamain, who had read Balzac, professed certain theories concerning the duties of husbands. His great fear was that his wife might be unfaithful to him, and his great grief, that he knew no infallible means of avoiding the ridicule of becoming a deceived husband. When, after three years of marriage, it struck him that life was empty and monotonous, he conceived the idea of providing some amusement for his wife, in order to keep her mind from wicked thoughts, and to prevent her from getting "flighty notions." When the Mid-Lent season provided the occasion for a ball, he decided to take her to it. No doubt there was no immediate danger, but this would serve as "a safety-valve." Monsieur Duhamain was proud of his enlightened liberalism, favoured half-measures, talked of authorizations, and recommended prophylactic remedies. He would have deeply regretted the necessity of going "to extremes." Because he had seduced a couple of his friends' mistresses, he liked to think of himself as a man of some character, who understood all about women and could not be taken in by their wiles and stratagems. Nevertheless, he wanted to avoid an explosion.

❧ A LOVELY DAY ❧

Deux précautions valent mieux qu'une,
Et le trop, en cela, ne fut jamais perdu.

He misquoted La Fontaine, whom he called "the old boy," and whose *Contes* he had carefully hidden in his library behind the "History of the Consulate and the Empire," books which were never disturbed. There, at least, he was certain that they would never be discovered.

Madame Duhamain suffered obscurely from the pretentious solemnity of her husband. Although she formulated no definite charges nor specific grievances, she would have liked him to be a little more of a "good fellow." With her he was pontifical and almost pedantic, explaining little things with big words, dilating upon trifles to give himself an air of profundity, and affecting to take everything seriously. He found extraordinary complications in the simplest things, always suspecting the unknown, which frightened him, and the soundness of his few ideas was rendered absurd by the miserable pompousness of his language, the solemn banality of his jokes. In his own family he had the reputation of being about as jolly as an undertaker's mute.

He looked on marriage as a sovereign function, a supreme duty, which he periodically discharged with pontifical solemnity. The secret grief of Madame Duhamain was this love without any element of the unexpected, these moments of unplayful intimacy, when her undressing provoked no teasing interruptions, no desire for caresses, these passionless nights,

when her lips received only the most dutiful kisses.

"It is just one of his perquisites," was her melancholy reflection.

When Monsieur Duhamain, after mature deliberation, proposed to take his wife to the ball, she could not repress a movement of pleasant surprise.

"Really?"

"Yes. I thought it would amuse you."

"Really?"

Surely her husband had not so far forgotten himself as to play a joke upon her? Perhaps it was a trick.

"Really?"

She repeated the word with an incredulous smile.

Was he in the habit of saying things he did not mean? . . . Yes, indeed. They were going to the ball, and in his matter-of-fact way he announced the date, the place, everything, including the price of the tickets.

"At Maurice's, at the Salon des Familles? But where shall you get tickets?"

Did she think that he had not foreseen that? It was not very difficult. The end justified the means. He would write to the president of the club. Or rather, no. Monsieur Trudon, the secretary, lived in the same house, on the floor above them. He would go to see the gentleman; that was safer. It was better to be careful than sorry. He would ask him for tickets. These little services were customary between neighbours.

Trudon was not unknown to Madame Duhamain. They often met on the stairs, and she liked his politeness, the respectful way in which he would stand aside to let her pass, his courtesy, when he saluted her, in taking his pipe out of his mouth, a meerschäum pipe, beautifully coloured, and silver-mounted. In due course they exchanged a few words.

"You are quite out of breath, Madame."

"Oh, don't remind me of it. It is all right up to the third floor, but after that . . ."

"We ought to have a lift."

A conversation followed in which they both complained about the landlord.

On another occasion she regretted that she was no longer as active as she was when a girl.

In a very amiable tone he replied:

"Oh, that is not so very long ago!"

"Do you think so?"

They both smiled, and Madame Duhamain entered her apartment feeling greatly flattered.

Although Trudon was rather low-sized, and the first signs of a paunch thrust forward the lower part of his waistcoat, on which a medallion dangled from the end of a gold chain as thick as an old-fashioned bracelet, she thought him very nice, with his fashion-plate elegance, his vaudeville humour, and that joviality of a tradesman who does business while joking with his customers and digging them in the ribs. There was a man who would drive away melancholy, and with whom it must be pleasant to

live! Whenever she saw him, he had his hat cocked on one side of his head, and looked happy and care-free. His big red face glowed above an enormous necktie with such sincere good humour that one was forced to join in his laughter in spite of oneself. Moreover, Trudon wore gold-rimmed glasses and on the little finger of his right hand a diamond ring—all of which was considered most distinguished by Madame Duhamain.

She used to lead him on. One day, as they were going up the last few stairs, she went so far as to stretch out her hand towards him and say: "Pull me." It was just childish playfulness and she did not attach much importance to it. When she thought of it afterwards, she felt in no wise embarrassed. She was not doing any harm, was she? There was no harm in having a little joke. Trudon, on the other hand, cursed himself for a fool for not having tried to kiss her, and resolved to make up for the lost opportunity another time. In his opinion the forehead of Monsieur Duhamain was long since provided with certain ornaments, and he counted on adding his share to the decoration.

He lived in the apartment just above the Duhamains, and was in the habit of giving dances. Often that respectable couple fell into slumber to the accompaniment of his piano, on which clumsy hands pounded out the *Valse des Roses*. Sometimes, also, they grumbled when they were awakened in the middle of the night by the continuous noise of feet shaking the floor to the tune of the *Sultan Polka*.

Between dances the laughing voices of women could be heard, during the fine summer nights, on the balcony covered with flowers which Trudon himself carefully watered every day. So much so, that Madame Duhamain, seized with a craving for amusement, and attracted by the flowers, used to envy the gaiety and the horticultural luxury of her neighbour.

One morning, for no apparent reason, perhaps because of the age of one of the flower-boxes, perhaps because of an invisible crack in one of the pots, the water fell down in a shower upon her head, as she was taking the air beneath. She leaned out of the window, tried to see Trudon, and shouted, but he did not hear her. She was all alone. The charwoman had just gone out. Monsieur Duhamain was away. As the water continued to fall, she grew tired of this persistent stream, and ran upstairs to Trudon's, rang the bell, and lodged a gentle complaint.

Was it possible! He assured her he was dreadfully sorry. If he had only known!

He begged a thousand pardons and asked anxiously:

"At least, your clothes are not spoiled, I hope?"

Privately, he was congratulating himself on this chance which had brought him face to face with Madame Duhamain in this fashion. He knew a trick or two, yet he would never have hit on this. Why does one never think of these simple things? It was a good tip, which he proposed to use on future occasions.

They were standing there looking at each other.

He was in the hall and she was on the landing, leaning a little forward, with her hand against the doorpost, and breathing in short gasps. Some fair curls, beginning to turn brown, had slipped from under a white cotton boudoir cap and fell over her eyes, which had dark rings underneath them from too much sleep. She had just washed, and from the handkerchief which she pulled out to stifle a little cough, from her sky-blue dressing-gown, which fitted her perfectly and emphasized the outline of her hips and the soft lines of her uncorseted body, from her mouth, from her freshly washed hands—from every part of her plump little person there emanated a disturbing perfume. It was an odour of jasmine, an expensive perfume to which, in spite of her husband, the surviving coquetry of Madame Duhamain clung. As she stood there, her face rosy with emotion, with all the shyness of a boarding-school miss and the opulent grace of a mature woman, she was enormously desirable. In his own mind Trudon compared her with his mistresses, even with those of whom he was proudest! How far removed she was from those kept women whom he had loved for the duration of a supper-party, a drunken spree or a dance! Above all, how superior she was to the silly creatures supplied by his friend Chanousse, who ran an employment agency, and who used to send him indiscriminately for his fifteen-minute romances all the cooks, servants and maids out of work in Paris!

In the presence of this respectable little woman in her simple *déshabillé*, he was seized with a fantastic

desire, and, deeply moved by the hope of captivating a pretty woman, delighted at the thought of deceiving a husband, he redoubled his amiability and his polite attentions.

What was he thinking of! He had not even asked her to come in. Surely she would like to sit down for a moment? It was a stiff climb up those stairs.

"I am sure you ran up four steps at a time."

She said she had not.

"Well, do come in and rest yourself."

The clocks were striking in the neighbouring apartments around them. The cuckoo of a Swiss clock could be heard. At the end of Trudon's hall the bell which Madame Duhamain had rung was still vibrating softly, with the muffled sound of a musical box.

"Why do you not come in?"

But she refused, and said she thought it was a strange request.

He offered to show her his flowers.

Oh, she knew very well how lovely they were.

"Then, why not come in and see them?"

"Into a bachelor's rooms? Thank you! What would people say? What would my husband think?"

"Would he be jealous?" asked Trudon slyly.

"Well, you never can tell."

"Oh, if you cannot tell . . ."

He had opened the door wide, taken her hand, and was pulling her gently. She struggled.

"Will you kindly stop! What do you mean by

putting your hands there? Can't you see people are watching us? It would be a nice scandal! Joking aside, such behaviour is unworthy of a gentleman."

"Are we getting angry?"

"No. But you know that you are asking what is impossible. Let me go."

Yet, she could not help laughing. She thought Trudon very funny, with his pressing invitations and his friendly rudeness. At one moment, if he had known how to press his advantage, she would have entered willingly, just to see. She was filled with a curiosity to look around a bachelor's establishment, to stay there for a moment, with everything respectable and above-board, discovering secrets, finding hairpins, and trying to guess which of the little ornaments she touched had come from women. But the next instant she had no such desire. She remembered she was there on the landing, that people might pass, people with wicked tongues, a servant coming down from the attic, a messenger delivering parcels to a customer, or the concierge going from floor to floor polishing the brass door-knobs. They would see her, and heaven only knew what gossip they might spread. Then she became stubborn, and a note of anger came into her voice.

No! No! No! She had said no. What sort of woman did he take her for?

Shaking herself suddenly free from the grasp of the astonished Trudon, she lifted the skirts of her dressing-gown, and disappeared down the stairs shouting:

"Be more careful next time, won't you?"

She was referring to the flowers, the water, this affair on the balcony which had compelled her to take this step which seemed so terrible now that she had done it. Out of fear she raised her voice, trying to look as if she had been taken by surprise, as though she were apologizing for what she had done and explaining it. However, the staircase was empty from top to bottom. There was not a sound, except the violent banging of the door which Trudon had just closed after Madame Duhamain with a furious gesture of rage.

In a couple of months the recollection of this interview brought to both of them the sadness of regret and the disturbing emotion of a great desire.

The night of the ball, Monsieur Duhamain overwhelmed his wife with his fussy attentions. First of all, he presumed to dictate as to what she should wear. All the week he had grumbled about the colour of her dress, about the low cut of the neck, about the ribbons, about everything. It was really cut too low in front; it was all nonsense; she would catch cold. Now that he was resigned to the inevitable, he piled up on a chair all the head wraps, all the capes, all the shawls he could find in the bottom of the wardrobes. He insisted on taking them all with him, together with an old-fashioned stole which shed its fur. It was better to be careful than sorry. . . . "All right, that will do," said Madame Duhamain. "If I catch cold I shall be the first to

know about it. Besides, when you are amusing yourself you never get ill." In the end, he grumbly decided to throw the stole back into the press, amongst the old things from which he had rescued it.

Monsieur Duhamain tried to be patient, to hold his tongue, fearing he would say something disagreeable. For an instant he thought that, since that was the way—well, they would not go to the ball. But then, they had incurred expenses; the hairdresser had been paid; white gloves had been bought, and the cab had been ordered. The money would be wasted. So he resigned himself and silently watched his wife finishing her toilet. Her affectations while admiring herself in the mirror, powdering her shoulders with the swan's-down puff, her tripping steps whilst going backwards and forwards in the room, made him mad. He felt insanely jealous at the thought that it was for other men that his wife was dressing up like that. For the first time since they had been married, he saw that Madame Duhamain was pretty and graceful. Suddenly he became inanely proud of her. He was in a hurry to take her out where she would shine and do him credit, and in a burst of naïve vanity he wished her to be a great success, to have lots of dancers. He hoped she would be the queen of the ball. He smiled at her and spoke gently: "Please hurry, Ernestine." His lips were trembling with promises of kisses, and a great desire came over him to hold her in his arms and cover her with caresses.

Madame Duhamain was not listening to him, or rather, she answered indifferently: "Yes" or "No," "Leave me alone," in an irritating fashion. In her starched petticoats, holding the long train of her dress of silk gauze, trimmed with satin matching the pale blue tint of the stuff, stuff bought at the Bon Marché and said to be a great bargain, it seemed to her, she was freed of her husband. At last she was going to have a good time. She carelessly hummed a song or a tune, and from time to time, in the middle of the room in front of the mirror, she would let herself go, and turn round and round like a mad person. Then suddenly she would bend down, letting her skirt swell round her, as she used to do when she was a little girl.

"Do you know that it is nearly eleven? The cab must be waiting."

"All right, it will wait. Well, I am ready. Let us go." With her bare shoulders emerging from a mass of ribbons and laces, her arms bare, and all around her a perfume of fresh bath, powder, and fine underclothes, she put her arms round his neck, saying:

"Kiss me, sir, quick, quick, don't be so slow!"

He, looking serious and badly dressed, his arms too long for the sleeves of his dress-suit, the dress-suit he had worn at his wedding, was in a very bad humour. Of course, he had no luck. For the second time that evening he had been struggling with his studs, and it was only after a ghastly battle that he had been able to arrange them without damaging the whiteness of his shirt-front.

He kissed his wife perfunctorily, as a duty.

"All right, let us go. We shall be frightfully late."

His burst of passion had gone, and now the ball appeared to him a fearful bore. He wanted to be done with it, and did not hide the fact from her.

"Really?"

She looked at him directly, with a teasing air, and laughed at him. Then, pushing him with a friendly gesture of disappointment:

"What a horrid grumbler you are!"

They were silent all the way. They were sulking, angry with themselves, with the horses, which they accused of not going quickly enough, with the cab and its narrow interior, where they could not stretch their legs. Madame Duhamain, fearing that her dress would be crushed, her hair disarranged, spread herself out, taking up the whole seat and slowly crowding her husband out. Little by little she had forced him to move up, and now he had only a small space on which to sit. At last, at the end of a dark alley, globes of white glass made a half-circle of white lights. Policemen could be seen standing still in their greatcoats, at each side of a big door, the sides of which were opened and shut continually. Cab doors were slamming noisily. Evening wraps, shawls passed, hiding in their folds women who were greeted by the ushers. A hubbub of voices could be heard, crowned by the breathless tune of a trumpet playing the coda of a mazurka. It was the Salon des Familles. They entered.

A quadrille of lancers was beginning. From one end to the other of the big drawing-room where chandeliers like luminous artichokes gave forth the harsh light of two hundred gas jets, couples were bowing deeply, ceremoniously to each other, without any enthusiasm. In all these dancers, men and women, one felt a certain stiffness, a desire to uphold the dignity thrust upon them by their evening clothes.

Sitting with her husband on a seat covered with worn-out velvet, Madame Duhamain saw passing in front of her the apotheosis of elegance to which her neighbourhood could attain. She recognized, as they passed by, her baker, her butcher, all her tradespeople. She recognized girls she saw sometimes at mass, young men she met in the street, in the Bois de Vincennes. All of them were there, from the wine-merchants' assistants, looking stiff and awkward in their evening clothes, playing with their opera hats, all looking as ceremonious as supers playing the part of guests in third-rate theatres, to the gardeners of the valley of Fécamp, in frock-coats, with heavy-nailed shoes, embarrassed by their hands unaccustomed to gloves. They were all there, from the slim dressmaker showing the good taste of her dress as a living advertisement for her models, to the fat shop-keeper's wife corseted as for a great occasion, and wearing the dress she reserved for wedding ceremonies and the nights where they got free tickets for the Opéra Comique. All of them were there, even

the wife of the police commissioner, a tall woman wearing an evening dress of black velvet so *décolleté* that it was creating a sensation. Modesty was outraged. Behind her, coarse words were said; whilst the young ladies lowered their eyes, laughing, the young men were running up to have a look at her.

There were also faces unknown to the neighbourhood, magnificent toilets from Paris, well-turned-out young girls combining an air of refinement and vice. Audaciously, Monsieur Verain, a well-known accountant, was showing off his mistress, a faded blonde, so thin that she seemed dried up in her black silk dress covered with white camelias. The respectable mothers stopped yawning to wonder at her audacity in appearing so brazenly. They complained, and the organizers of the ball, very much flustered, were considering the advisability of going to the two outsiders and of putting them out.

"Do you see that man?" said Monsieur Duhamain suddenly to his wife, showing her a man at whom she did not even glance. "I bet you he is a detective."

"That's his own business."

"Yes, I saw him. He is employed in the Town Hall and he goes to balls in the evening to watch things."

These were the first words that he uttered after an hour of silence. Now; in the warm atmosphere, perfumed by those bare necks, by all those feminine bodies, his anger was cooling. He was becoming gentle, he was forgetting the stupidity of the cabman who, neglecting to drive them up to the covered

entrance, had obliged them to cross in the fog fifteen yards of pavement at least. He had counted them. He was ready to forgive the slowness of the people at the cloak room; he did not wish to remember all the difficulty he had in finding his tickets, lost in the depths of the pockets of his overcoat. He also was seized with a desire for gaiety.

He was thinking he would spend the night enjoying himself and, eyeing the ladies, he chose the one whom he would invite to dance, and he got his friends for the quadrille. He tried to dance, but his stiff attitude, his want of any sense of rhythm, the persisted clumsiness with which he walked on the delicate shoes of the young ladies, made him a marked man, and his advances were rejected unanimously. Then he decided he would go away and play billiards in a back room with a bald man, a stranger, who reduced him to despair by the ease with which he went round the table.

From time to time he would return, bumping against the dancers, to rejoin his wife, and finding her in a state of perspiration, carried away by the ardour of the dance, he would say:

“My word! you certainly are having a fine time! Mind you don’t overdo it.”

Once she asked him to dance with her, just one polka. But he was afraid of making himself ridiculous, and refused. No, there were plenty of dancing-men without him.

“As you like, dear.”

“All right. But don’t catch cold.”

"Poor dear," thought Madame Duhamain, "he must really be dreadfully bored!"

She was having the time of her life. Never, since the far-off night of her wedding, had she been to such a party. The huge room looked beautiful to her, in spite of its spotted mirrors, its dingy velvet curtains and the walls covered with mythological figures designed in grey on a wine-coloured background. She inhaled with delight the dusty air which rose from the carpet, beaten by incessant footsteps, that acrid, choking smell, suggesting Indian ink, which is given out by the clothes of heated crowds. Everything added to her pleasure, even the jostling, and she laughed wildly when her dress was torn and large pieces lay strewn on the floor, and when hobbling uncertainly on one foot, she had to wait until her partner could find her right slipper, which was too big and perversely fell off every moment, and was kicked to the other end of the room by the dancers.

She discovered unsuspected beauties in the waltzes played behind artificial plants by a large orchestra, with violent efforts of the wind and wood instruments: As she whirled around, abandoning herself, her head thrown back, she felt intoxicated; the beat of the polka made her skip like a young lamb. As she gently swayed to the slow measure of the mazurka, dreams of love dimmed her humid eyes, and the gentlemen recommended her to their friends as a woman who responded to their desires. But she was not easy in her selection of partners, and did not dance with everyone, for she knew she would always

find a partner, since Trudon was there at her beck and call.

He came forward, rolling his hips a little. His black trousers were very tight and showed the muscles of his legs. He balanced himself lightly on the toes of his shiny pumps, a white rose in his button-hole and a perpetual smile on his face.

"Will you dance this one with me?" Of course he would! He was delighted to be of any service to her. Nobody, in his opinion, danced as well as she. It looked as if she had never had anything else to do all her life. He paid her compliments and made strenuous efforts to be original. During the polkas, he caught up her train under his arm to prevent its being walked upon. If there was an accident, he was ready with pins to repair the damage. If she felt tired, he found her a chair. If her slipper fell off, he found it in a twinkling, and brought it back with great solemnity, comparing her to Cinderella. This little joke made them both laugh.

From time to time Monsieur Duhamain appeared and cautioned his wife.

Did she want to make a show of herself in front of everybody? Trudon took her part, and would not leave her until she had promised him another waltz.

"Two-time?"

"Yes, if you like."

He even proposed to teach her the schottische, which was even then an ancient novelty, but unfamiliar to her.

No, she preferred waltzing. The floor was less

crowded, because mothers forbade their unmarried daughters to waltz, on the grounds of decency. The few who defied this injunction usually missed the time, and quickly returned to their seats, giddy, breathless and with a stitch in their sides. Thus the room became emptied. Only a few couples were waltzing in complete comfort. The elderly wall-flowers on the seats along the side, and those who were resting in chairs, fanned themselves with their handkerchiefs, and looked on, for want of anything better to do. All eyes were on Trudon and Madame Duhamain. There was no doubt that couple got on well together!

Madame Duhamain was turning gracefully, astride, as it were, of Trudon's right knee. One step forward and one backward, according to the beat, she rose and fell with the regular movement of a pendulum. At certain moments, when she was whirled around, nothing could be seen but a tempestuous flutter of petticoats and under-things, and her little feet turning on the tip of her shoes. She swayed to the right and to the left, and then everyone admired the way in which her train alternately wound and unwound around Trudon's legs, like the gentle coiling of a lazy serpent.

Suddenly the cornet began to play more loudly and she danced more rapidly. It seemed as if she were being cast back and forth between the wood instruments and the brass like a top in a game of pool, and she whirled madly around. Her skirts billowed, "like a fan," as the mothers all said. The

young fellows were laughing and making lewd comments, longing for the moment when they could see her garters. Trudon, who was a little taller, held his fat, smiling face just above the daisies in Madame Duhamain's hair. He was as red as a turkey-cock and was beginning to perspire.

They chatted. It was he, wasn't it, who had got the tickets? She was very grateful.

Oh, no. She must not mention it.

"I say, isn't it warm?"

"It certainly is."

"Oh, how clumsy I am!"

She had got out of step. They fumbled about, for a moment, counting, one, two, three, and then started off again.

"I am afraid I don't dance very well?"

Gallantly Trudon defended her against herself.

"No, no. You are libelling yourself, I assure you."

"Oh, I know. You have to say that out of politeness. But I can see I am tiring you out."

"Not in the very least."

"Just think how long it is since I have been to a dance. I can barely remember the figures in a quadrille. At the convent they pretended to teach us, but they never really did. The nuns didn't allow us to put our arms around each other's waists. They thought it immoral. Just imagine!

She stopped.

"You are tired," said Trudon.

"I tired? Not at all. I could go on like this all night. I beg your pardon."

"What have you done?"

"I wasn't looking what I was doing. I am ruining your coat." She was apologizing because the powder on her face and shoulders had whitened Trudon's dress-coat in places. But you could not do without it. She didn't use much—just a little to freshen herself up. She had brought her puff, and had it in her pocket, wrapped up in a piece of paper. She wasn't coquettish. She did not have a little vanity case of ivory with a mirror in it. Monsieur Duhamain had wanted to get her one, but she had refused on grounds of economy. Those little things are so dear. Well, for this once she could do without it. Nobody would notice.

Trudon agreed, and changed the subject.

"This is a nice waltz."

"Yes, very catching."

"Have you the first mazurka free?"

Madame Duhamain hesitated. She was afraid she would attract attention by dancing too often with Trudon. So she said vaguely, without daring to refuse outright, that she would consult her card. She thought that dance was free.

"Perhaps you have promised it to your husband?"

"To whom, did you say?"

"To your husband. You never can tell."

"Oh, to him!" said Madame Duhamain in most contemptuous tones.

They said nothing, but danced in silence for a second, as if the involuntary mention of this name embarrassed them. The waltz continued under the

direction of the orchestra-leader's baton, gently, slowly, with the softness of a caress and the soothing motion of a lullaby.

Trudon was the first to speak.

"By the way, I don't see your husband anywhere."

"He is somewhere about."

"Oh!"

"Yes, I think he is playing billiards."

"You don't say so."

"Yes, isn't that funny?"

They held each other closer, and their lips almost touched. Madame Duhamain was rendered reckless by the thrill of pleasure, the excitement and the strain of the late night. She could feel Trudon's warm breath on her cheek. But retreat? The thought never occurred to her.

The waltz was nearly over. The final bars were played with passionate speed.

All the couples had drawn together. The men's shirt-fronts were pressed more closely against the powdered bosoms of the women; hands grasped their waists more firmly, while left arms were thrust out to avoid bumps. The beat became faster, exaggerated, skipping from instrument to instrument, dying down suddenly, as if breathless and exhausted. The drums suddenly revived it, passed it on to the violins, which strung it out in sharp notes that seemed to drive the dancers from one end of the room to the other, as though they were being tickled.

As they turned around and around, Trudon became tender. In tones at once respectful and pas-

sionate, he poured forth all the usual twaddle of love, the imbecile declarations, exhausting the formulæ beneath which brutal desire is concealed by gallant phraseology. He swore to love her.

Madame Duhamain heard him without any signs of anger, for her vanity was flattered and her senses stirred. She discovered in herself a sudden coquetry, and got a wild delight out of this first homage to the provoking abandon of her body. She was all ears for these words of sensual adoration and sentimental lust, which she had never heard from her husband. But she made a show of resistance, making reservations:

"No, really. It wouldn't be right."

Madame Duhamain's hair was coming loose, her curls were losing their shape, and her fringe was stuck to her forehead. Under her arms damp circles were showing against the light shade of her frock. But the indefatigable Trudon began again to overwhelm her with praise. He admired her clothes, her beauty, her grace, everything about her, confusing them all on purpose, to give an air of greater sincerity to what he was saying. She did not answer him, so, fearing he would again miss his opportunity, he hastened to achieve his point. As if he were taking possession of her, he suddenly kissed her shoulder.

She did not object, but looked straight into his eyes and said languorously:

"Do you really love me?"

He did not expect this question and was somewhat taken aback.

"Can you doubt me? Where can I prove it to you more easily than here?"

She continued to remain silent. The last sounds of the waltz were falling upon an empty room. They stopped. Sleepy mothers were enveloped in an acrid odour of dust and perspiration. Gentlemen were bowing, and as the women bowed in return their low-necked dresses revealed chemises all wrinkled and out of place. Through moist white gloves, whose finger-tips were stiff with perspiration, hands were shaken. In the distance the hoarse crow of a cock was heard.

As he accompanied Madame Duhamain to her seat, Trudon argued, and tried to overcome her scruples.

"Oh, please don't!"

"We could have a little fun."

"No. Please don't ask me."

Monsieur Duhamain arrived from the other room, looking very much out of temper, with deep rings under his eyes. He said he was very tired and wanted to go home. Besides, it was high time to leave. And he showed his wife his watch, which marked three o'clock in the morning.

"Come on. Let us go."

Madame Duhamain refused. She would not have the wrap which he tried to put around her shoulders by force.

"Just this one dance more. Then I'll come."

"No, no. The cab is waiting. You'll be a wreck to-morrow morning."

She did not wait to listen, but was off with Trudon as the orchestra struck up the first bars. They were so impatient that they did not pay any attention, but danced the introductory measures.

Monsieur Duhamain ran after them and stopped them.

"Come now, don't make me lose my patience, Ernestine, when I tell you."

But when he recognized Trudon he became more friendly. In his turn he thanked him for his kindness in getting them the tickets, and politeness impelled him to praise the evening. It had been very jolly, in his opinion. Perhaps a trifle warm. What a crowd, by Jove! What a crowd! Every now and then he would interrupt this laboured enthusiasm and say:

"Hurry up, now, Ernestine! Hurry up!"

The noise was increasing and was becoming riotous. Restraint was thrown aside; the dancers whirled madly, and the whole room joined in the choruses of the popular songs. People had finally got tired of standing on their dignity for three hours, of saluting each other ceremoniously and saying: "We must be on our good behaviour," or "This is like a dance at the President's."

Crude gaiety was now the order, helped on by clumsy jokes and stupid witticisms. When a dance stopped, the girls shouted: "Encore!" People were ready to laugh at anything, provided it was silly. As the women began to let their manners slip as well as the shoulders of their gowns, and to lose their

temporary dignity at the same time as the flounces of their faded dresses, while waltzing and fatigue loosened their hair, and their elegance departed, some wits conceived the idea of repeating the impatient words with which Monsieur Duhamain was trying, in a corner, to hurry his wife:

"Hurry up, now, Ernestine! Hurry up!"

The phrase passed around from one couple to another. Each person repeated it without knowing just why, seized with a fit of imbecility. The phrase circled about, drowned by the bass fiddles, floating above the tremolo of the flutes, submerged in the deep notes of the trombones, but emerging as lively as ever with the pizzicato of the violins. Madame Duhamain, who was changing her shoes in an embrasure under the orchestra platform, could hear ironical voices behind her whispering:

"Hurry up, now, Ernestine! Hurry up!"

A violent rage seized her. In a flash she realized the disillusionment of her respectable life. She had a furious conviction of the crass insignificance of her husband, of the prolonged platitude of her life. Yes, he had always been tactless, grouchy and intolerable. At home it did not so much matter, but now he was making her ridiculous. He made scenes in public in front of the whole neighbourhood, which was laughing at her.

"Hurry up, now, Ernestine! Hurry up!"

The button-hook trembled in her fingers, as she thought of her vanished youth. Yes, she was chained for life to this booby, who could not even let

her enjoy herself to the full just for once. He was taking her away just when things were getting lively. And it was the last time. She had no doubt that the next dance would take place without her.

A nice evening, indeed, which would leave her only with regrets! Really, it was too much of a good thing! To come there to be annoyed and made the public laughing-stock! She would get even with him.

"Hurry up, now, Ernestine! Hurry up!" Monsieur Duhamain repeated.

"All right. Here I am." And she got up, her eyes shining with tears.

"You haven't forgotten anything?"

"No."

"Will you take my arm?"

"No. There is no room. Walk ahead; it will be easier." As Trudon came up to say good night, she indicated with a glance the awkward appearance of Monsieur Duhamain, as he forced his way through the crowd, in his dusty dress-suit. She smiled with an air of pity and contempt, then stooped forward and whispered:

"Eleven o'clock, Sunday morning, Pont de Bercy."

Having given him this rendezvous, she disappeared amid the loud noise of a polka.

Trudon was still smiling. He wrote the hour and the place in his note-book, indicating Madame Duhamain only by an initial. He was a man of order, and had unsuspected touches of delicacy. He

would never have pardoned himself for any indiscretion that might compromise a woman. With a lighter heart he then proceeded to find a partner for the quadrille, which was being preluded by such a crashing of drums and cymbals that it sounded as if the orchestra on its platform were pounding out steel music.

PART TWO

PART TWO

THE following Sunday, Trudon was at the meeting-place twenty minutes before the time. This respectable little woman really did interest him, and inspired him with passion . . . almost. He had not slept well, his mind all topsyturvy, over-excited by the anguish of desire. All the preceding night he had tossed about in the ruffled sheets, consumed by a fever of impatience. He had heard every half-hour strike, and, being unable to hold out any longer, he had got up very early. In his desire to be on the move, he had marched up and down his room, looking constantly at the clock and cursing the slowness of the hands.

"Well, there's a nice how-do-you-do!" exclaimed the servant, as she looked in amazement at the pillow, the eiderdown quilt and the blankets.

"What have you been up to?"

And she added maliciously:

"She must have been a restless sleeper, was she?"

Trudon told her not to be a fool. Who asked her for her opinions? She could keep them to herself.

This allusion to his casual love affairs exasperated him. It seemed to be an insult to Madame Duhamain, to contaminate her. None of his other adventures had ever caused him such emotion. He

was afraid that it would be impossible to overcome her resistance; he felt humiliated in advance by the thought that he might fail to make a hit, that he might not succeed. Usually the women whom he undertook to conquer did not resist very firmly—merely for form's sake. With them it was often a clever trick to exasperate desire, to get more money. But such elaborate comedies of modesty did not last long in the presence of a couple of twenty-franc pieces, the charm of having one's rent paid, or a small present, such as a pair of shoes. Sometimes, in fact, he got what he wanted by the exercise of his hands and wits.

To-day terrible forebodings filled him. A new man was born in him, a timid, irresolute, stupid Trudon. His cheek abandoned him. Madame Duhamain was a respectable woman, and this idea, which never left his mind, both delighted and dismayed him. He felt that he was losing his nerve, and believed the difficulties were insurmountable. As he pondered over delicate phrases, seeking for words that would not shock her, he elaborated euphemisms which, nevertheless, clearly revealed all his thoughts. He kept saying to himself: "She's an honest woman," and his desire increased at the same time as his sense of his own inferiority and powerlessness. No. This was not going to be easy. And all the things they wear! Her petticoats would drive him mad. How can a man get round such obstacles? It was they that rendered women impregnable.

What should he do? He turned over phrases,

built up speeches which he would try to make to her, and got stuck. Suppose his memory should fail him? If he were to stand there in front of her unable to utter a syllable, like an idiot? And then, if he did talk, a lot of good that would do him! There is always a point where words are useless then . . . then. . . Well, it could not be helped. Whether she took offence or not, he would manage all right. Respectable women are like all others. The whole point is to choose the right moment. He was not the first man to find himself in such a situation. What did others do? He began to recall all his friends, who had told him of their good fortune during the bragging confidences of stag parties when smutty stories were retailed. It never occurred to him that frequently, either out of drunkenness, vanity or a simple delight in lying to astonish him, they had exaggerated and distorted the facts and circumstances.

"Am I not as clever as they are?"

A name occurred to him. Not so clever as he? No. That could not be possible. Comforted by this idea, he had brushed his hat, put a flower in his buttonhole and had set out.

At the corner of the quay and the Boulevard de Bercy he stood waiting, chewing a cigar to keep himself in countenance. It was warm. The obstinate March sunshine shone straight down, leaving not an inch of shade along the walls, and at intervals along the avenue it lit up with little flames the glass of the street lamps. Trudon stood there anxiously, his

back turned to the Seine, looking straight ahead and seeing nothing but the carts laid up on the banks of the Lyons Railway, and the heavy mass of a police station, installed amidst the crumbling plaster of an old city gate. To his right, shops extended, a row of low buildings with anæmic walls evidently used in places as urinals. Here and there, between coloured placards, were closed doors from whose gaping apertures flowed reddish, stagnant streams that stank and carried the bungs and advertisements of wine-merchants into the mud and slime of the cut reeds. On the left, beside a barrel-merchant, above the haycocks standing in the courtyard, there arose the slender stems of the lightning conductors on a huge forage warehouse. In front of this a sentry, with his rifle on his shoulder, walked up and down incessantly.

There were few people about: from time to time a butcher's boy passed by whistling, with his basket on his arm, and a white apron tied around his waist; a cooper wearing an apron of coarse, black linen, with his arm through a bunch of barrel-hoops. A few empty drays bounced heavily as they were shaken by the trot of their horses. Trudon recognized them as belonging to the most important firm in Bercy. In the distance, to the left, where a cart had stopped in front of a mineral-water factory, he could hear the rolling of drums. Then the noise receded and died away as the guard came down on their way to the barracks.

Suddenly a herd of oxen came on to the Quai de

Bercy, and for a moment Trudon forgot Madame Duhamain, his appointment and his long wait. He became interested in the barking of the dogs chasing the stragglers, in the bites which made the legs of the cattle bleed. He became filled with pity and felt indignant at the brutality of the driver, a herdsman with a silk cap and a blue blouse reaching to his knees. The man was drunk, and walked backwards and forwards stumbling against the animals and beating their backs with heavy blows, which produced a sound like that of empty boxes. Trudon shouted to him, asking why he ill-treated the beasts.

The man, between hiccups, snubbed him by remarking that the gentleman could mind his own business. Was he a police officer? Let him show his credentials if he was.

As Trudon continued obstinately, the man came up to him and requested him to shut his mouth, or he would shut it for him, in double-quick time. It looked as if there would be a quarrel, but Trudon decided to say no more. He was furious at having been intimidated by such a blackguard, and his glance followed the harassed animals which stumbled patiently along the roadway with lowered heads, lowing with pain. Through the cloud of dust behind them, he could see them trying to climb over each other, and suddenly falling back on all fours amidst a storm of oaths and blows.

The time dragged by very slowly, and, forgetting that he had prolonged it by arriving too early, he accused Madame Duhamain and her whole sex. It

was always the same with women; they could never be in time. But, suppose she wasn't coming at all? Well, so much the better; he didn't care. He was so uneasy and tired that this idea was a relief. If she left him in the lurch, that would solve the problem. But his vanity was aroused and he could not stand the thought of being outwitted by a sly baggage.

"Cab, sir?" shouted the driver of a passing hack. Trudon shook his head angrily. He seriously believed he had her fooled. His offended pride was suffering; he lost his temper and began to abuse Madame Duhamain, calling her a silly goose, when he suddenly thought he saw her.

Her black silhouette stood out against the dusty background of the boulevard. A bunch of tea roses shook in her brown felt hat, and under a fine veil of black tulle, sown with little golden spots, her face looked rosy, flushed by the air and by the happy thrill of the adventure in which she was engaged. She wore a confection of military cut, covered with an infinite series of braided silk arabesques, which was open at the throat so that through the braid the dull gold of a little medallion was visible. The sleeves were three-quarter length and were met above the wrists by brilliant yellow suède gloves. She had narrow Louis XV slippers on her feet, which moved rapidly in front of each other, and as they did so, the steel buckles caught the sunlight for a moment and then disappeared beneath her white starched petticoat, the rustling shadow of her dress. It

seemed to Trudon as if at every movement her whole being sang.

He stood in a state of idiotic surprise, overwhelmed by the happiness that was approaching. So she really was coming! She had come! In this street costume, which was fashionable yet discreet, he found her even more tempting than on the day when he had seen her in her dressing-gown, even more physically alluring than on the evening of the ball, when his coat had rubbed against her bare flesh through the lace of her gown. Moreover, she did not turn in her feet, with that duck-like motion which Trudon detested even in the prettiest women. The irregular white line of the flounce of her dress gave a suggestion of raised skirts which added to his desires.

With an effort he quieted the furious beating of heart, threw away his cigar, with an elegant gesture, walked towards Madame Duhamain, and said boldly: "Good morning."

She blushed, and for a moment the little pearls in her earrings were almost invisible amidst the scarlet. Trudon smiled, held out his hand, and complimented her on her punctuality. No. He would never have hoped she could be so punctual. Then he offered her his arm, which she refused, explaining that she was not doing what was right. Her husband had such confidence in her. Did he reflect how disgraceful it would be to deceive the good man? He suspected nothing. That morning he had gone off to superintend some work in the country. You had to do so

if you did not want to be robbed by the contractors. At great length, as if to quiet her conscience, she discoursed to Trudon, recounting trifles, telling him about her family and home. He discovered what she had had for dinner the night before, and that they had a tidy sum of money invested.

Trudon listened calmly. Madame Duhamain said nothing that he had not heard a hundred times from modest females on the defensive, and this common stupidity, these customary commonplaces, restored his self-confidence and increased his audacity. He recovered his balance, and began to feel that he could "grapple with the situation." With his head bent towards her, his cheek tickled by the ribbons which formed a knot at the side of her hat, he allowed her to talk. He was accustomed to women, knew the hesitations in their daring, their evasive caprices, the apparent scruples which precede their surrenders, like the innumerable knotted strings and folds of paper with which practical jokers like to wrap up their presents, and which must be patiently undone, knot by knot, wrapper after wrapper. With an air of tender resignation he waited until she had "got all that off her mind." He himself took care not to hasten matters, but answered yes or no, at haphazard, or made some non-committal remark.

As Madame Duhamain repeated that, although not exactly poor, they were not rich, he said:

"That may be. But you have health."

"Oh, as far as that goes, we have never known a day's illness; neither my husband nor myself."

Trudon declared that it was better "to pay the baker than the doctor." Then he became interested in Duhamain and asked if he had gone away far, and by what line and to what station. Did one have to have a transfer?

"No. He is at Juvisy."

She had been there recently, one week day, her husband having agreed to take her with him.

In order to be agreeable, Trudon praised the place, the Pont des Belles Fontaines, the old cemetery, where the tombstones were crumbling away, eaten by the moss and thrust aside by the incessant growth of vegetation; the church with its back to the road, into which one entered as if it were a cellar, after going down a long flight of steps, the clear Orge river, the rocky grottos of the Castle—the whole thing pell-mell, as the facts occurred to him.

She listened in wonderment. She had seen nothing but an inn, rather dirty, where she had to stay all day, miserable at not being able to go out because it was raining so hard. Half a dozen lithographs on the walls represented the exploits of a Napoleonic hussar. Beside her a quarrel broke out amongst some people who were playing cards, when the time came to pay the bill, and they had almost come to blows. Good heavens, how bored she had been! Her hat and dress were ruined, the railway station was cold and damp, she had caught cold walking through the puddles, and that was all she remembered of the place.

"Did they not show you the post house, the room

where Napoleon learnt that Paris had capitulated in 1814?"

She did not even know that Juvisy had been "the scene of historic events."

All at once Trudon had a vision of Duhamain. He fancied he could see him superintending the construction of the house, mounting ladders, giving orders, unfolding his foot-rule to take measurements. The architect seemed to dominate Juvisy. Trudon could see him everywhere, always in the way, offering to the eyes of the curious the spectacle of his battered hat, dented in places where it had knocked against the scaffolding; his black coat stained here and there with white plaster.

"What a pity!" Trudon murmured, as if talking to himself. "We might have gone there!"

Oh, no! Madame Duhamain did not want to do that. She would prefer to return home.

"So soon."

Yes, it wouldn't take her very long, and on the way she would get something at the pork-butcher's. When one is alone, it is not worth while cooking.

"Are you really going to leave me so soon?"

Of course, wasn't it better? Why prolong this childish escapade? Why go any further?

Trudon smiled and, lowering his voice, he whispered sweetly:

"Naughty!"

He had noticed that she was not wearing her every day clothes, that she had new ribbons in her hat, the hat she used on important and fashionable occasions.

He said to himself: “My dear, you have not been to church, for you have no prayer-book; it is not in your pocket, for it would bulge and drag from your belt. Don’t try to tell me that you have dolled yourself up in this manner merely to return home and heat up some pigs’ feet.”

However, he professed to find her proposal quite natural, and offered to accompany her part of the way.

“But suppose people were to see us!”

He burst out laughing. What nonsense! And explained his theories on the subject in order to reassure her. According to him, one ran less risk of being surprised in one’s own neighbourhood than elsewhere. People do not stay at home; they have business which takes them out and prevents them from remaining on their balconies spying into the affairs of others. In Paris, on the other hand, you ran into people unexpectedly on street corners. Absolutely impossible to avoid them. In any case, nobody knew them at Bercy, so she had no need to worry.

He had taken her arm and they were walking in step, with calculated slowness. Trudon realized that Madame Duhamain was weak and undecided, yet he was afraid to say anything, to commit a blunder; he was frightened at the idea of losing her. However, by the time they had reached the police station, at the corner where the Justice of the Peace lived, he “played his last trump.” Stooping tenderly towards Madame Duhamain, he said:

"So you are really going to leave me?"

"You know I must."

"Then why did you come?"

She replied:

"I did not like to keep you waiting for nothing, and I wanted to tell you to stop thinking about me."

Trudon pressed her arm warmly.

She knew perfectly well that he could never forget her. This being the only thing he could find to say, he repeated it and elaborated upon it in various forms, full of gaudy phrases and clumsy gallantries. The conclusion always was that he loved her, that she must have known it for a long time, and that a woman so lovely could not be unkind.

Madame Duhamain did not say anything in reply. She allowed herself to drift on this continuous stream of words. Like a drowning woman, whose clothing is heavy with water and whose strength is exhausted, she did not struggle but allowed herself to sink into this sea of soft words.

Retracing their steps, they saw the bridge rising before them, the row of cabs beside the footpath, behind the toll-gate. From time to time a trumpet sounded, and above the river the white smoke of a little steamer hung in the air, waving like a plume.

Madame Duhamain walked along mechanically with Trudon, as though in a dream.

"A lovely day, isn't it?"

She looked up. In every direction the sky was blue above their heads. Over the roof of the Gare

d'Orléans, whose glass glittered in the sunlight like a silver stream in fairyland, some light clouds, with yellowish fringes, hovered like flakes of dirty wool.

This did not disturb her, and while the ribbons of her hat fluttered in the warm breeze, she repeated:

"A lovely day!"

"Wouldn't it be nice to go somewhere?"

They both agreed that it would be charming to wander in the woods, where the fresh green would be broken here and there by splashes of sunlight. They became lyrical at the idea of hearing the dead leaves crackle beneath their feet, and talked of picking violets and bringing back a huge bunch. Arm in arm, until train time, they would wander aimlessly through secluded paths, feeling the soft damp grass beneath their feet, while the deer gambolled in the rustling underwoods and the melancholy note of the hunter's horn mingled with the distant chimes of the angelus.

Or they would take a boat and float gently down a little stream full of sunken weeds, its surface covered with white and yellow water-lilies. He saw himself in the bow, holding the oars and turning his head from time to time to avoid obstacles. She was seated facing him, in the stern, beneath her parasol, one hand trailing in the rippling water, wetting the lace on her sleeves in the effort to catch a passing minnow. For hours and hours they would float with the current, enjoying every moment of the warm day, their faces brushed by the blue tulle wings of the dragon-flies, listening silently to the noise of a water-

rat scurrying into its hole, the splashing of frightened frogs, the continuous whisper of the wind in the tall poplars along the bank. At every bend of the river, at every clearing in the bushes, they would be surprised by a new picture, charmed by a new horizon.

"Wouldn't it be lovely!"

And they repeated:

"What a lovely day!" thinking less of that actual day than of that more indefinite one of which they dreamed.

Then Trudon said:

"Well, you'll come then, won't you?"

But she would not make up her mind and still resisted:

"No. Not to-day."

Why put it off? Who could tell when they could have another day? Perhaps they would never be able to meet. Here he deemed it wise to put in a few moving phrases anent the brief span of existence, the eternal vicissitudes of life. One should seize the opportunity when it was possible. He added, as if the argument were decisive and irrefutable:

"Since you are free."

Madame Duhamain was affected by his melancholy. For a moment she, too, had fears lest she should miss her opportunity. But a stronger fear restrained her:

"What about my husband?"

Her husband! Absurd! Was she so trusting as to believe that he had gone to superintend work on

Sunday? Let him tell that to the marines! You couldn't fool Trudon with that kind of talk. He must play her some fine pranks, by Jove! Husbands were notorious, with all their tricks and innocent alibis. They could always invent plausible pretexts for neglecting their wives and having a gay time with . . . He was about to say: "whores," but refrained from a sense of delicacy, contenting himself with the expression "loose women." Husbands did not mind treating their marriage vows as "scraps of paper," and were the wives not perfectly entitled to do the same? It was tit for tat.

He became animated and grew eloquent, producing arguments, citing names and examples. He was certainly not more strait-laced than the rest. He granted a few chance adventures from time to time, but some men really went too far. When he thought . . . And he told a story which had filled the papers a few weeks earlier, the adventure of a respectable gentleman, a provincial lawyer, who had been burnt to death in a brothel in the neighbourhood of the Stock Exchange. It served him right, by Jove! His sin had found him out.

"And what about the woman?" asked Madame Duhamain.

Hysterical with fear, she had jumped out of the window, and she was picked up on the pavement below with a fractured skull.

She certainly belonged to a disgusting profession, but such a death was too terrible. For a moment Madame Duhamain felt sorry for her. She pitied

her and called her an "unfortunate creature," for want of anything better to say, no doubt; in order to get away from herself, to silence Trudon whose attacks on husbands irritated her. In spite of herself, she applied all his generalizations to Duhamain. But without noticing her mood of pity, Trudon continued:

"Listen! Will you bet that, if we go to Juvisy, we shall not find him there?"

He took her silence for consent, and with a snort of satisfaction he proceeded to libel architects. According to him, when they were at the *École des Beaux Arts* they mixed in very shady society, had vile connections and led fearful lives. Although they married and pretended to have completely settled down, every now and then they were seized with a desire to revisit the scenes of their crimes. So they "always returned to their first loves"—he gently hummed the line from the song.

Madame Duhamain was heart-broken as she remembered the nights when her husband had come home very late, the evenings when he alleged that there was "an old boys' reunion." Now she was certain, of course, he was deceiving her. There was no such dinner as that which he pretended, where the pupils of the same professor used to meet, the old college friends, who defied prejudice by coming together on the thirteenth of each month. It was a fake, a pretext invented by Duhamain in order to be free and to shake a loose leg. No. Of course not. He had never been secretary of any association, and

it was sheer hypocrisy when, in moments of confidence, he used to regret that he could not write his reports in verse, like Mestandy, who was with him at Lejeune's studio, and who humiliated him by sending his reports autographed and with a dedication. She would be a fool not to do exactly as she pleased with a man who left her all alone at home while he went off to do the Lord knows what. She ought long ago to have framed her own conduct accordingly.

Nevertheless, her anger ceased; she hesitated to take her revenge out of respect for public opinion, out of fear of being seen, of gossip; she was afraid lest she might hear the tradespeople at the market whispering behind her back: "You know, that's the lady who got into the scrape." Once more she tried to resist Trudon's appeals and, as she could not think of any more good arguments, she inspected herself from head to foot with a dissatisfied air, examined her costume, and lied blindly:

No; she was not dressed well enough. She had come just as she stood, but she really could not go anywhere the way she was.

Trudon smiled with his look of assumed contempt, and declared that her clothes were just right. The dew spoiled dresses, clothes caught in barbed-wire fences and were torn, and petticoats got soiled trailing in the grass. His idea was the right one. What was the use of dressing up to the nines in order to go into the country? He kept repeating the word "country," guessing vaguely that Madame Duhamain was about to escape from him, and that a trip into

the country was the only way to overcome her hesitation. She had merely to choose; they would go wherever she liked. Which did she prefer? Robinson? Montmorency? The Western or the Vincennes railway? One place was really as good as another to him. He preferred private rooms because they were more comfortable and quieter than the public woods in the neighbourhood of Paris, where one is always liable to be interrupted at the psychological moment. Moreover, he felt that he was a little too old to indulge in rustic romance without appearing ridiculous.

"Well, shall we go to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges?"

Of course, she knew every corner of the place. She had eaten in all the restaurants, and had often climbed the mossy stairs of the church. It was always the goal of her walks with her husband, and it was the only place where she wanted to go. A sort of tacit resistance, an interior restriction, made her imagine that, in this way, she would not concede too much to Trudon. She thought that she would have less to fear in this village where she would feel at home. She fancied that the familiar streets, the well-known landscape, would protect her, that she would derive help from everything she had seen and felt there, and that her fundamental respectability as a married woman would rise from behind the walls, the milestones and the bushes to defend her.

She invented safeguards for herself, believing that she could have nothing to fear from a danger which she voluntarily and freely encountered. Now she

grew a little impatient. She wanted to be in the train, to feel her ticket in the palm of her glove, and she began to question Trudon, asking the hours of the trains, suggesting they should hasten their steps in order not to be late, and assuring him that she was "really not a bad walker." "Aren't we going to hurry a little? It is not so bad there, you will see. There is a fine view and the perspective is magnificent."

It was a favourite expression of Duhamain's, his formula of admiration in the presence of nature. The architect gave geometrical shape to his enthusiasms. He liked to climb hills, to gaze upon distant horizons, because in the distance the medley of light colours, the smallness of the houses and trees, rather resembled the interminable plans whose execution kept him stooping for whole days over a table and a pot of paint. Unconsciously Madame Duhamain repeated his phrases and intonations. She had acquired a little of his way of looking at things, his way of speaking, and there was a flavour of her husband about her comparable to the flavour of cork which certain wines have.

"Do you not like it? Perhaps you would prefer another place. Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, at least, is within easy reach, and I must be home to-night before ten, you know. I told M. Duhamain that I was going to see a friend and that I should probably dine with her."

She added a few details showing her to be a woman greatly to be pitied. Her name was Caroline Lamb-

lin; she had been her comrade at first communion, and then one of her bridesmaids. She had married in her turn, contrary to the wishes of her family, in a fit of impetuosity, and the man had left her after three months of marriage, suddenly, without any discoverable reason.

"One of those Lovelaces," said Trudon, trying by this hypocritical criticism to insinuate that his was a heart of gold, incapable of an evil deed.

Yes, and now poor Caroline was reduced to keeping a day-school for girls at les Batignolles, near the fortifications. She was in dire straits and "lived on privations."

Trudon expressed compassion, out of politeness.

"Now, it is understood, isn't it? You promise that I shall be home by nine o'clock? Aren't you coming?" and she pulled him by the arm.

He had to refuse. He thought it was late and he could not allow her to set out without eating. Wasn't she as hungry as himself? He felt empty and complained of a ravenous hunger.

"Why not, indeed? It is noon," he said, drawing his watch from his pocket.

On the other side of the Seine, amidst the white steam of the Gare d'Orléans, which ran behind the houses and was invisible, amidst the heavy smoke which the factory chimneys that arose at intervals belched continuously against the blue sky, the bell of the Église des Deux Moulins, dimly visible, rang out the angelus with slow strokes.

Trudon added:

"You see, I regulate the sun by my watch."

Madame Duhamain did not feel called upon to deny this, but at the moment she did not feel hungry. Often, when her husband was delayed by business, she did not have lunch before half past one, or two o'clock. Besides, she could still feel the chocolate she had drunk at breakfast, so she could wait awhile.

Then Trudon took refuge in irony. Certainly, it would be charming to partake of a rustic repast in a shady dell. But the leaves were not much in evidence, and they were always later in the country than in town. He said that the trees were still leafless outside Paris. It was all right in the public squares, where the houses sheltered the trees from inclement weather. They would simply get sun-stroke, and much good that would do them! Everyone knew that the sun in March was very strong. Perhaps they would escape with a cold in the head. Trudon imitated the grimaces of a person who wants to sneeze, tries hard to do so but fails, and Madame Duhamain laughed heartily.

But one should not trifle with a cold. Trudon knew of cases where people had died of it. In other cases the cold had gone to their chests; they had developed chronic bronchitis, and had coughed for the rest of their lives. He next proceeded to denounce the open-air restaurants, saying that you never could get anything there. He dwelt upon the slowness of the waiters, the delays between dishes and the irritation of having to consume vast quantities of bread while waiting. After all, the pleasures

were exaggerated, when insects fell from the honeysuckle on to the plates, and half-drowned spiders struggled in the sauces. And to show what a wit he was, Trudon imitated with his fingers the movements of the insect kicking the liquid with its legs and struggling desperately against its sticky death.

"You horrid man!" said Madame Duhamain, tapping his hand to make him stop.

Trudon did not reply. He was satisfied with the effect he was making, smiled, and continued to joke. He criticized the wooden benches, said they were very uncomfortable and were "upholstered with peach stones."

"Well, it is more rustic."

He burst out:

"What about the ants that climb up your legs? Is that more rustic?" Rusticity was all right, but it should not be allowed to interfere with one's meal hours. Irregularity was very injurious to the stomach. He predicted terrible indigestion for her, and cited his own case as an example. As a result of such imprudence he had been obliged to follow a diet, and to drink Vichy water for two years, a horrible drug which did not go well with wine and gave it a violet hue that was most unattractive. He concluded by saying that they must stop trifling, and that, instead of playing the fool, they had better go and "look after some grub."

"All right, then. If you want to."

It had suddenly occurred to Madame Duhamain that it would be a fearful bore to return home for

lunch. Nothing was ready. She would have to light the stove, lay the table, change her clothes, for she could not cook in the dress she was wearing. The apron which she usually put on over her turned-up dress, the apron with which she covered her Sunday dress from her waist to her feet to keep it free from spots, her big cotton apron, was being mended. A live coal had fallen on it and had burnt a huge hole right in the middle. For three days she had been labouring to restore it. Her ambition was to avoid sewing a patch on it, and all her domestic genius was concentrated on the heroic task of catching up the threads and reweaving them, a heroic enterprise which tired her eyes, required all her attention, cotton of various colours, and the use of three needles alternately. So she finally acceded to Trudon's suggestion. They turned to the left and found themselves on the Quai de Bercy.

At the end of the quay wall, lined by a wooden railing, the Marronniers Restaurant displayed the huge, faded gold letters of its signboard, the melancholy vulgarity of its façade. It is characteristic of pleasure that it renders depressing the places where it is to be found; the people who provide it have something of that air of boredom and sadness which continuous laughter lends to the faces of old comedians. There was a picture set in the wall above the door, but the chestnut-trees which it once depicted had almost disappeared under the combined onslaughts of sun and rain.

The restaurant was famous in the neighbourhood,

being patronized by the better-class business people. All the week the merchants on the quay, wine and brandy-agents, truck and dray-owners, of whom Trudon was one, lunched there, transacted business, took their coffee and played billiards. They kept pipes there and were always sure of meeting their friends and being well received. They discussed politics and while they joked they found out from each other how business was going. It was a place for making appointments and concluding deals. Debtors behindhand in their payments knew that the bank representative was always there on the days when bills matured. He received their money as he ate, counted out the notes beside his plate, and took a tip of five francs on every thousand as a reward for his patience.

Customers intoxicated by the variety of the samples which they had tasted, came out unsteadily, their eyes unnaturally bright, their stomachs heavy with the heady vintages of an elaborate lunch. The windows were shaken by the continual arrival and departure of cabs, and doors banged with the incessant coming and going of people. The conservatives held their election-meetings there, fashionable and quiet wedding-parties gave dances there after dinner, with the piano. From Monday to Saturday there was a great noise of bottles being opened, or opinions clashing, or hurrying waiters, of arguments about orders. On Sundays the whole house lapsed into silence. There was neither piano-playing nor conversation. The bells

outside the private rooms hung motionless on their wires, unread newspapers were piled up on a table, the pen used for making out bills lay dry beside the inkwell. None of the week-day customers came; they were all elsewhere, occupied with their pleasures, their wives or their mistresses. At rare intervals a cab would stop and discharge a passenger on the oyster-shell path, some terrified Don Juan from Paris, in search of a beefsteak to satisfy his hunger and a sofa for his effusions.

The empty establishment was enjoying its Sunday rest and taking things easily. The chef in his white cap had deserted his pots and pans and was rubbing the fur of a black cat the wrong way, while it kept its eye on two red partridges encaged in the window beside the city directory. The cashier had left her seat behind the desk, surrounded by carafes, punch bowls and various nickel-plated utensils from which the silver had worn off. She was sitting in the centre of the restaurant, embroidering, and looked like a lady on her "at-home day." A waiter was yawning, not far from her, on a sofa. The floor, carefully strewn with sand, innocent of match ends and other debris, spread out around them, a uniform yellow.

"Look," said Trudon, "they are expecting us."

Madame Duhamain made a frightened movement and again stammered a refusal.

"No. Not there."

"Why? There is nobody."

The hat-racks were empty and there was no sound

of billiard balls in the rear. On the first floor the windows were wide open to allow the smell of tobacco, the week's accumulated odours of wedding-parties and love-affairs to evaporate. The tables were laid, and the clothes hung stiffly starched. At intervals the inverted glasses glistened as the light struck the disks in which their stems terminated, while the napkins folded into shapes threw their pale shadows, like mitres, on the plates. On the ground floor, across the middle of the plate-glass window, the curtains fluttered on their rods, soiled by the smoke and steam. A theatre placard badly secured with pins, and hanging crooked, announced a great success of three months earlier. Madame Duhamain stopped to read it.

"Was that play any good?"

Trudon had not seen it and did not know. Anyhow, it was a drama, and he detested that kind of play. His literary tastes were peculiar; he preferred smutty vaudeville or sentimental comedy, just as people with stomach trouble, who do not enjoy their meals, like only pastries and spices.

While they were talking, Trudon turned the handle of the door and, dragging Madame Duhamain after him, entered. The prolonged ringing of the bell aroused the sleepy waiter; the cashier dropped her work and bowed elaborately, and the owner himself appeared with a napkin over his arm, smiling graciously. While Madame Duhamain was blushing beneath the scrutiny of the glances fixed upon her, and shaking in her shoes at the curiosity which she

aroused, Trudon gave a knowing look, whereupon Monsieur Chamblé, the proprietor of the Marronniers Restaurant, asked the lady and gentleman to step up to the first floor. There he opened the numbered door of a private room.

PART THREE

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"A LOVELY day, isn't it?" inquired Trudon, in the tones of an old customer who gets a pipe on New Year's Day with his name festooned in enamel letters on the bowl, and who has his own private cue in the stand in the billiard room.

Old Chamblé, however, did not share his customer's lyrical enthusiasm. In his opinion the weather would probably break; the glass had fallen badly. Moreover, hail-storms were to be expected at that time of year. Standing at the window, he gazed questioningly at the sky and shook his head with grave forebodings. The clouds that had recently been scattered over the Gare d'Orléans had come together and were increasing in volume. They now formed a soft, moving mass rolling above the Seine, like the remains of some colossal aerial Tower of Babel, like a hovering ruin.

From the Pont de Bercy to the towers of Notre Dame, scarcely visible in the distance, at the extremity of the grey line of the quays, huge blocks of cloud were floating in the damp twilight of a gloomy day. Strange creations, fantastic edifices, were outlined by the continuous west wind. Whole towns seemed to glitter in the sun, then suddenly disappeared to make way for curious fauna, monstrous

animals, whose slow motions conjured up the terrible vision of a torpid world.

Suddenly through some wide rent in the clouds, in the bottomless crevasse of a shattered wall, a piece of sky would appear, as broad as the sea, and as blue as a sapphire. Floating islands of gold clashed with promontories of shadow, and scattered the light. They drifted on until, just when they reached the emerald-green horizon, a monster loomed up and absorbed the sapphire-blue in its enormous mouth, and obliterated the sea with its huge paw. The heavens became dark immediately and threatened a storm.

With Trudon's assistance Madame Duhamain took off her coat, and as she untied the strings of her hat she approached the window. She was amazed by the curious appearance of the domes of the Salpêtrière and the Panthéon amidst the banked-up clouds. As the sun struck them, they looked to her like two immense pots, and she protested against old Chamblé's opinion.

No. He was entirely wrong. There was no rain in sight. What a dismal prophet he was! If he had only looked in the other direction where the sky was clear! With a coquettish gesture of impatience she pointed to the Quai de la Gare opposite, all warm and white in the sunshine. The houses stood in rows of uneven height, and their slate roofs glistened dully in the bright light that inundated them. Open windows seemed to drink in the fine weather, and men in their shirt-sleeves could be seen here and there leaning out beside red eiderdown cover-

lets that were being aired. Sheets hanging out to dry cast moving shadows in the crumbling plaster of the walls, and great signboards hung out in front of the closed shops.

On the other side of the river, just opposite the Marronniers, the shop window of a paint-merchant displayed a loud splash of colour like a prism that is out of order. To the left the red lantern of a police station shone like a ruby. Through the railings courtyards were visible, full of unyoked wagons, carts and trucks with their shafts in the air like masts. Further on a long building threw upon the ground a shadow of its nine triangular gables; a few houses rose, after a series of walls, in the midst of a wilderness of gardens and lumber-yards. Then there spread out a few low roofs, while through the transparent framework of a barn under construction, trees could be seen thrusting up to heaven their green bouquets of leaves. A mist as of fine muslin enveloped the distant horizon, and the Pont National, half buried in the vapour rising from the river and the factory smoke of Ivry, broke the line of grey clouds in the background.

On the Seine below, the steamers passed, gay with parasols, bare-armed oarsmen rowed vigorously, and their skiffs flashed by with gleaming rudders, looking like great spiders with slender silver legs. Crowds in their Sunday clothes were hastening to the jetty, or were watching for the omnibuses, and in each direction, on both sides of the river, the yellow patches made by straw hats, amidst the sickly grass

and the piles of wood and barrels, indicated the presence of anglers. The stifling heat caused the thermometer which was hanging by a nail on the wall, to rise.

No. Of course not. It would be nothing. Those clouds would soon disappear, carried away by the wind.

Madame Duhamain was lying to herself.

Formerly, before her marriage, she had lived for a long time in the country, and like a villager she was accustomed to telling the weather by a number of little natural phenomena. She had not lost her habit of consulting almanacs; she always knew the phases of the moon, was concerned about eclipses, and could foretell probable atmospheric changes.

At that moment an examination of the sky could not leave her in any doubt as to the approach of bad weather. She knew as certain signs of rain those huge beams of sunshine which were cutting through the clouds like the rays of a monstrance. She well knew what was indicated by those stones which appeared to be damp in contrast with the others, at intervals along the parapet of the bridge. She knew what conclusion to draw from the heaviness of the atmosphere, the white light that flickered in front of her eyes. She could see rain in the greenish colour of the Seine, in the movements of the cat which was sitting on a barrel and washing behind its ears, in the painful tickling which announced the return of her rheumatism which no rubbing could cure. She

had seen a forecast of rain in the globules of sugar which had floated the day before in her black coffee. That was always a sure sign. Yet she refused to believe, and, being afraid to remain shut up with Trudon in this restaurant where she had come against her own wishes, she tried to prove that her fears were unfounded, doubted the accuracy of her observations, evaded the evidence, and gave herself courage by repeating to herself a phrase she had read in the almanac that morning, a consoling phrase: "Sunday. Fair."

No. No. There was obviously no reason for being uneasy. And, as if to produce conclusive evidence, she added:

"You can see that I did not even bring my umbrella."

Turning away from the window, she folded up her veil into a little packet which she carefully fastened by means of a hat-pin with a jade head. She looked at herself in the glass with an air of unconscious coquetry. While she was smiling at herself and while her rounded arms above her head were fixing her hair, Trudon remained in silent contemplation of her swelling bosom and the slender lines of her waist. He was wondering how much this charm and elegance of line were due to the arts of the dress-maker and corset-maker. He was afraid it might seem indelicate to put on his glasses, so he blinked his short-sighted eyes and his glances undressed Madame Duhamain, as he tried to guess what her curves

would be like when the "wrappings were removed."

"What is wrong with you? Why do you laugh like that?"

As she asked these questions, she sat down on a chair in front of him. He wanted to make room for her beside him on the sofa but she refused:

"No. No. I won't! When I say no, I mean it. And why do you laugh?"

He did not dare to confess that he had just been imagining her ready to go to bed, with nothing on but her chemise, her stockings underneath and very high boots. For a second he thought of telling her that he had seen her garters, counting in this way to lead the conversation into a propitious channel. But he hesitated out of delicacy and pusillanimity. He went on:

"I am a regular Jonah when I get into a restaurant. I cannot get any attention. It is maddening. The waiter isn't coming, you see. You'd think he did it on purpose."

However, he did come, and received an order for oysters and white wine to begin with.

They both remained silent, embarrassed by their brief intimacy, the novelty of their tête-à-tête. Trudon began to whistle, and in order to pass the time, he wiped his glass with the corner of his napkin. Madame Duhamain imitated him, under the vague impression that such precaution was necessary. Then, in order to break the silence, she requested Trudon to be so good as to hang up her hat,

which she had placed inadvertently on a side table beside a pile of plates.

"Why of course. . . ."

Trudon got up mechanically, very bored.

The hat was hanging on the rack, its ribbons floating, and a great silence invaded the room, broken only from time to time by the rattling of a bus, or the wheels of a dray, or the hoof-beats of an officer and his servant going off to some post amongst the stacks of barrels down at the corner of the quay.

When the oysters were served, Trudon sat down reflectively. He was getting nowhere. The "preliminary canter" seemed to be unusually long. Now that Madame Duhamain was there in front of him, when he could feel her dress against his legs, his foot close to hers, when their knives touched as they helped themselves from the cruet-stand, when their hands met on the neck of the same water-bottle, he began to wonder in what decisive manner he should attack. He could not decide whether to try protestations of love, which was too slow a method, or brutality, which he did not like, though he thought, in the bottom of his heart, that it was the surest way. In his uncertainty he began to invent a form of procedure, in which gentleness and force were combined, and exhausted his mind trying to find combinations, which he abandoned one after the other. The thing never seemed to work out right, and he became sceptical of ever "getting a start."

In vain he recalled the novels he had read in the train, the love scenes he had seen in the theatre. In vain he repeated to himself the passionate words and moving accents which drove the heroines into the arms of their seducers, the masterful gestures which, as the curtain fell, bowed the amorous creatures to the will of the young heroes. He felt those examples could not be imitated. In the real world, things did not move so rapidly; they developed with a simplicity and a calm which rendered declamatory speeches impossible and prevented great impulses. He was astounded by the difference which he had discovered between the exaltation of literature and the platitude of reality.

He became desperate. Memories of spiritualistic séances, fragments of theories which he did not know he had remembered, returned to him. He succeeded in believing that mysterious waves, hidden but powerful fluids, could emanate from him and dominate Madame Duhamain. All that was necessary was to will strongly, to look fixedly, so his mind became tense and his eyes wild and wide-open.

Madame Duhamain was rather surprised by the strangeness of his appearance, and, in order not to seem ridiculous, he apologized, alleging that he was worried about a troublesome business matter, or simply pretending to examine the flowers on the wall-paper.

"You know, it is very nice here," she said.

Again they were silent. A moment later Trudon

began again, but his hope of success had diminished. He believed that by speaking she had countered the magnetic current and destroyed the charm for ever. Obviously, the game was up. He could count on nothing. He became resigned. However, on the merest chance, he stretched out his legs under the table and squeezed one of Madame Duhamain's knees so gently that he fancied all delicacy of his soul was concentrated in that pressure. She did not object, but with her head slightly inclined backwards and her hand raised, continued to swallow oysters. She did not often eat them because they were so dear, and, above all, in order to spare the feelings of Duhamain, who could not understand how people could swallow "things" that were flabby and looked like spits. Madame Duhamain, entirely absorbed in her food, piled up the shells correctly on her plate. She had no thought of being angry at Trudon's redoubled familiarities. She simply found them uncomfortable and stupid. What did it all mean? Duhamain had also pressed her foot gallantly the night before their marriage contract was signed. As she recalled the frequent pressures on her knee to which she had to submit, underneath the table-cloth, from friends when they dined out, she felt amazed by the usual imbecility of expressions of desire, of declarations of love, and she developed a contempt for this man in front of her, who could not even provide her with the novelty of a new sensation. Life was endlessly flat, and the commonplace from which she thought she would escape in this adventure, haunted her,

aggravated by fear of detection and the secret remorse of having committed a wrong action.

Neither of them had found what he or she desired. An immense emptiness overwhelmed them. They became oblivious of time and lapsed into silences whose prolonged length flabbergasted the waiter. Except for himself, the people in Number Three seemed to be about as gay as "mutes at a funeral."

"What will you have next?"

He consulted them as to what they would like to eat. Trudon relied on Madame Duhamain's good taste.

Oh, anything he liked. She did not care. He ought to know better than she. She never could pick things out on a menu. There were always so many names she did not understand.

She pretended to be quite uninterested and replied with kittenish affectation. Since, without knowing exactly why, she had come up to this room, the best thing was to make the best of the rendezvous she had so foolishly accepted. She even found it rather amusing to take advantage of the opportunity to have "an excellent little lunch." So, while appearing to refuse, she imposed on Trudon the delicate menu of a woman who is not hungry, whose appetite is bird-like. She ordered, first, a *vol au vent* and *filet* of sole. She hesitated, feeling quite undecided about the roast.

"A leg of lamb?" the waiter suggested.

Yes, that would be all right, a leg of lamb. Then she ordered fresh green peas, cream cheese, and, as

she seemed to be accepting suggestions too easily, before the strawberries, which were the first of the season, she demanded an *omelette soufflée*.

This simple meal appeared to her to be an extraordinary debauch, for her wildest culinary flights were never made without considerations of economy, and her dreams, at home, always fell short of complete satisfaction.

Trudon, who was a heavy eater, would have preferred something more solid—more substantial dishes, such as a thick steak with plenty of fried potatoes, a fine Norman sole, but out of politeness he had given in, particularly as he was afraid to cross her wishes. In any case, he made it a rule to let women always have their own way, and argued merely to give them the illusion that they had convinced him.

“And what wine?”

“And what wine?”

“We’ll have the same again, won’t we?”

He put the question in such tones of authority that Madame Duhamain replied:

“Yes. White. It is better not to change the colour. But perhaps it will go straight to my head.”

Trudon did not believe there was any danger of that, but, as a matter of precaution, he advised her to drink some Seltzer and ordered a syphon.

When the waiter had served them, Madame Duhamain again looked around her and repeated:

“It is nice here.”

In the serial stories, private rooms were described

as being furnished in the height of luxury, the wainscots covered with gilt from top to bottom, the silk hangings impregnated with perfume and reeking of voluptuousness. Her husband's tirades had shown them to be obscure dens in which one had to lift one's skirts to avoid soiling them. The room in which she was, upset all her preconceived ideas. It was neither luxurious nor dirty, neither dark nor loud. The walls were covered with a light-coloured paper, with a pattern of trellis-work intertwined with branches and flowers, and the room answered Madame Duhamain's dream of a summer-house which she was going to have built in the garden of the ideal country place that would be bought when her husband had made his pile. She was utterly delighted with this temporary realization of her wishes, and she glanced around her complacently, enumerating, one by one, the flowers on the wall-paper.

"Oh, look, here are daisies; there are poppies and cornflowers."

In a rather silly fashion she continued to mention, one after the other, all the pieces of furniture, the hat-racks, the candelabras on the mantelpiece and even the curtain-bands. At the end of the room, against the wall, a sofa stood, and its worn print covering matched the wall-paper.

Madame Duhamain was seized by a fit of modesty and pretended not to see it. She did not mention it, and in the glass in front of her she could see herself blushing furiously. Recovering herself, however, she admired the hanging lamp-stand full of

artificial flowers, which drooped over the table with the rigidity of wooden shavings. She thought it in very good taste and would tell Adrien to get one like it for their dining-room in summer.

"Adrien?" Trudon inquired, grasping at the excuse for saying something.

"Yes, my husband."

"A nice name."

"Do you think so?"

"Certainly. It is most uncommon."

She did not agree with him and for a long time they argued as to what names were more or less refined. There were some names which really were funny. Trudon would not have felt flattered to be called Onésime, Symphorien or Pancrace. In his opinion, names corresponded to the moral condition of those who bore them. One could not be a fool with certain names. Nay, he went further. Names influenced people's lives, determined their vocations, made them celebrated. For example, a man called Valentine could not but be elegant. He had known melancholy Blanches, affected Berthas and romantic Matildas, and he cited others, all of whom owed to their names their gentleness, their pride or their inconsistency.

They passed in review all the male and female names in the calendar, enumerating the saints and martyrs, father confessors and virgins; barbarous and sonorous names were lost in the steam that rose from the hot dishes on the table. Then came softer sounds, with liquid vowels and terminations in *a*,

the nicknames of prostitutes compounded of affection and contempt, names taken from the novels of George Sand, from the covers of old waltz music. For a while he seriously deplored the loss of the republican custom of baptizing people with memories of ancient Rome, regretting the Brutuses, the Sempronias, the Spartacuses, the Gracchuses, the Lucretias, all those fierce names which inspired the soul with a love of liberty and a hatred of tyranny. Finally he became enthusiastic over the name Marie, a delicate name, whose anagram, *aimer*, was full of tenderness.

Yes, indeed, say what you will, there was poetry in names. Some set one dreaming, and from others there emerged a vague promise of voluptuous pleasure. Some invited passion, others induced antipathy. Then, gallantly, as though to sum up all his theories with one irrefutable proof:

"Now, could you ever have been called Udoxia, Petronilla or Scholastica?"

He added further examples, less extraordinary, but which he professed to find entirely ridiculous.

"But how do you know that my name is not Gertrude?" Madame Duhamain asked, carrying on the joke.

Trudon refused to believe her, and they both laughed, showing their teeth, their mouths a little greasy from the gravy.

"Well, if my name is not Gertrude, what is it?"

"Ernestine, of course," said Trudon with a great air of confidence.

Madame Duhamain was greatly surprised and was about to reply when the waiter entered.

"Look at him," said Trudon. "With such a face I bet his name is Nicodemus."

The waiter assumed the dignified attitude of a person whose personal pride has been wounded, and declared dryly, in very choice language, that he was not paid to become the laughing-stock of customers. If they were dissatisfied with the service, they could complain to the boss, who was not far away. He could not allow himself to be made fun of.

"He got out on the wrong side of the bed," said Trudon when the waiter had left the room. Then he pitied those cross-grained people who cannot stand a joke.

But Madame Duhamain returned to the point. How did he know that her name was Ernestine? Where and from whom had he heard it?"

"Why, the last time, at the ball."

"Ah, yes," she said sadly, "at that ball."

Like a flash, the Salon des Familles appeared with all its lights and the full blare of its orchestra. A sudden and involuntary evocation brought back to her forgotten details, people whose names she did not know, but whose faces she recognized: two initials embroidered on the lining of an opera hat lying on a vacant chair. Bare backs passing, on which one could see the red marks of old blisters; the nitrate of silver of artificial beauty spots hiding pimples appeared yellow against the whiteness of the

shoulders, and all round her a crowd of waltzers were smiling at each other with trembling lips on which kisses still lingered. Joy hovered in the dusty air. She remembered the languishing air of the cornet, nervous and ecstatic, during which Trudon had kissed her. And it all seemed very sweet to her because it was very far away.

Then Duhamain appeared, pale for want of his night's sleep. She saw him again as he walked towards her. He jostled the dancers and attracted their attention. She shuddered at the touch of the hand which he placed on her shoulder to stop her in the waltz just beginning, and she could hear him repeating:

"Come now, hurry up, Ernestine!"

Ah, yes. He remembered. And while she was changing her shoes at the foot of the platform, amidst the noise of the whole crowd foolishly repeating the ironical chorus, one of the violinists had turned towards her and shouted in her ear:

"Come now, hurry up, Ernestine!"

The stupid fool! The vividness of her memory rendered these things so real that she still did not know what irritated her most, the insistence of her husband or the insolence of the musician. With an intonation full of the sadness of great regret, she said:

"We had an amusing night, didn't we. . . . ?"

She stopped speaking, putting a question into her silence.

Trudon thought the moment was a favourable one

in which to introduce his Christian name, and he confessed that he was called Alfred.

"Didn't we, Alfred?" resumed Madame Duhamain, as if intoxicated by her memories and excited by her old anger.

"I certainly did have a good time. I almost got a stiff neck."

Trudon was delighted at the idea that this stiff neck was caused by her having leaned her head too long on his shoulder.

"When I got home my chemise was all ruffled up my back."

"Impossible!"

At bottom, this naïve detail did not interest him in the least. In other circumstances he would have found it vulgar, unpoetical and destructive of those illusions which even the most brutal men like to preserve about the most abandoned woman. But with all his projects ruined and his stratagems, it seemed to him that this word "chemise," incessantly repeated, made him more intimate with Madame Duhamain, and surrendered to him in advance something of her naked body.

During this conversation, which he thought very clever, Madame Duhamain experienced the feeling of embarrassment of a woman who has been interrupted in her dressing-room *en déshabillé*. Her deepest sensibilities and pruderies were wounded. Every phrase, every intimate detail, seemed to her an insult, and she was seized with a feeling of nausea.

Something collapsed in her, and a sad boredom descended upon her as she discovered the secret coarseness of Trudon. To think that, for a whole week, all her hopes had been centred on this man, that he had looked like the realization of her ideal!

Trudon continued the conversation. He paraded what he believed to be his great knowledge of women, and laboriously recounted the secrets of their undress which they had allowed him to discover. He spoke of chemise straps being shoved into the corset under the arms instead of being buttoned over the shoulders. Laughing stupidly, and with all sorts of smutty insinuations, he analysed the elegance of women, and referred to the harsh necessity for the use of violent perfumes; with assumed innocence and pretended naïveté, he made mistakes in his references to insertions, purposely confusing tulle and muslin, Chantilly and Malines laces, in the hope of forcing Madame Duhamain to give detailed explanations, proofs that he could verify with his own hand.

She, however, did not correct him. She was saying to herself that her husband was right when he tried to tear away from the enervating waltzes of the Salon des Familles. Why had he taken her there? It was certainly not her suggestion. On the contrary, she had never thought of such a thing! How stupid of him to leave her alone in that crowd, exposed to the intoxication of music and pleasure. Duhamain's complaisance was ridiculous, and she became irritated by his inappropriate acts of kindness. Why had he left her? To play billiards!

My goodness, what a game! And that was how she came to know this coarse creature, this boor, this perfect idiot. Consoled by the violence of these mental insults, Madame Duhamain took a sardonic pleasure in looking at Trudon as he revelled in his own fatuous imbecility. So that was the person whose presence had delighted her, whose charms had enchanted her; it was from him she had received the kiss that was to soothe her like music and caress her with the softness of a summer breeze!

When the methodical absurdity of her husband and the overpowering banality of her domestic life became too much for her, she had sighed for a Platonic friendship, someone to whom she could open her heart and pour out her confidences and gossip. She did not demand that adoration on bended knee which some of her old school friends smilingly encouraged, bending their victims to their caprices. All that she wanted was someone with whom she could release the girlish side of her nature, which was always held in check by the solemn pedantry of Duhamain; not a lover, but one of those men, indifferent to her physical charm, whom the literary ladies invariably call "my dear colleague," a comrade with whom she could occasionally have an engagement, meetings leaving no feeling of remorse because she enjoyed them without any bad intentions. She had never desired anything else. But now that "something else," which was her name for the vague and undecided element in her dreams, was revealed to her as a disgusting reality. Ah, what a difference

there was between what she had been seeing and hearing for two hours and that adventure on the staircase of which she had deliciously cherished the memory for so long!

Her thoughts turned to her husband. He was not so ill-bred as Trudon, but he was not much cleverer. Thus, whatever way she turned, marriage and adultery alike offered her the same prospect of stupidity, and adultery had the further disadvantage of compromising her and lowering her in the estimation of her friends. Henceforth her mind was made up. Like those discouraged patients who refuse to turn over in bed because the change of position merely changes their pains, she resigned herself. When it came to a choice of banality, she preferred the legal platitude; as between one boredom and another, she would rather endure that which did not diminish the respect in which she was held, nor sharpen the tongues of the neighbourhood gossips against her. She felt herself impregnable in the respectability which offered her at least the hope of some profit.

Trudon was not discouraged. He had stopped discussing toilet secrets and piling up indiscreet lavatory details. He now turned upon Madame Duhamain the coarse humour which breaks out in excursion trains going through tunnels on the way back from the country on Sundays, and rocks the very axles of suburban railway carriages. He told of the pranks played upon guards and porters, the songs bawled out at stations, the pinching of women's knees in the darkness of tunnels, and the great row

between two people who had got into the same compartment. One wanted the window open; the other tried to shut it, so that finally, for the sake of peace, a third passenger had calmly put his fist through the glass.

Although this ancient tale had served many a time. Trudon declared he had been an eye-witness, if you please. He even mentioned names to make it sound more convincing. It had happened to his friend Chanousse. There was a fellow who was always having adventures. On another occasion, in the train, he had taken advantage of a short tunnel to kiss the lady opposite to him. When they came out into the light, the whole compartment began to laugh and joke. People were splitting their sides. The heat had made the rouge on the woman's lips melt, and Chanousse had two red stains on his cheek like crushed raspberries.

When he had finished giving out as his personal impressions and observations all the silly anecdotes which he learnt by heart every day in the newspapers, Trudon discoursed enthusiastically about *cafés-concerts*. That, in his opinion, was the real theatre, the only one that a really intelligent democratic government ought to subsidize. You sat at your ease, "under the foliage," took a few drinks and broadened your mind. Besides, the music was not half so bad as people pretended. The orchestra was often composed of prize students of the Conservatoire, so . . . you could hear parts of grand opera, and awfully nice songs. He could not deny that cer-

tain tunes moved his soul and brought tears to his eyes.

Out of deference for Madame Duhamain he did not say too much about the women of the theatre. He thought that their wicked reputations were somewhat exaggerated. After all, who knows whether some of them may not have taken up that profession to help their families? In this connection he mentioned the case of a girl, who had a walking-on part at the Porte Saint Martin, who had been awarded the Monthyon Prize for charitable deeds, a fact which showed that there were decent people everywhere. His chief enthusiasm, however, was the comedians. By Jove, they did put over some funny stuff—sometimes a little rough, perhaps. But, you know, all just harmless fun. In any case, he did not believe in taking life too seriously.

He then proceeded to enumerate what he called the "big shows," naming the popular artists, and affecting technical terms such as "going on," "having pep," "putting on No. 1," "getting the public," "headliner"—all phrases he had picked up from a woman whose lover he had hoped for a time to become. The show business was really wonderful! There were tears for the loss of Alsace-Lorraine; patriotism was its strong card; rousing songs urged the audiences to fight, flamboyant poetry was declaimed and German music turned to ridicule. This, to Trudon, was the last word in art and extremely amusing.

"Have you really never gone to such shows?"

"No."

Well, he told her frankly, she was wrong. She could never regret doing so.

"Another drop of wine, won't you?"

As Madame Duhamain did not reply, he filled his glass to the brim.

"Oh, please!"

"Why didn't you tell me when to stop?"

She was not thinking of what he was doing. She was flabbergasted by Trudon's conversation, dazed by an opiate of imbecility. She shrugged her shoulders contemptuously, without caring whether he saw her and took offence.

Now everything she had desired seemed to have lost its attraction. Every word of Trudon's added to her disenchantment. His stories destroyed her ideas and tarnished her hopes. The things of which he spoke seemed low and contemptible; they were infected by the stupidity of his own conversation. If *cafés-concerts* amused him, then that was a proof of how idiotic they were. Henceforth she would have no desire to go to these places which had so long fascinated her with their gaudy posters, and the sounds of songs and music which they heard as they passed the doors, when Duhamain used to say: "I see they are singing." Her illusions as to what was pleasure were being dispelled. As for love, Trudon had a way of being passionate which made love odious and ridiculous, just as the sweetest melodies are spoiled by the imperfect fingering of bad violinists.

Trudon simply could not stop talking, he was so pleased at being able to hold forth for so long. By a strange association of ideas, after having delivered his opinions on politics and declared the necessity for caution, after discoursing upon progress and poets, the latter being particularly esteemed because they were "brain-workers," he decided to launch forth against the tramway, then a recent invention. He accused it of being created solely and simply to kill people. It was like certain stations on the Vincennes line. It was absurd to leave so much space between the platform and the carriage steps; one could easily break one's neck. Obviously, the engineer in charge of that work must have been one of those people who pay substitutes to pass their examinations for them. Under the old régime strange things happened. One day two nuns had almost sprained their ankles. He was proud to say, of course, that he had nothing to do with the Church, and if they wanted his advice, he would have kicked the Papists out of the convents and turned the latter into free homes for men of science. Yet, say what you will, they were human beings, like you and me, and you couldn't see them in pain.

Madame Duhamain had given up all efforts to listen to him. Her eyes were staring wide-open and she was lost in such a profound reverie that she was oblivious of everything. She was mechanically crumbling a piece of bread, and rolling little balls of dough out of sheer boredom.

"What?" she said, vaguely conscious that Trudon expected her to say something.

He repeated his last sentence while she raised her head and strained her attention, like a woman who is making an effort to understand. Then she said: "Certainly."

Nevertheless, Trudon continued, let us do them justice. Even amongst the Sisters of Mercy there were good and intelligent women. To mention one instance, look at Sister Rosalie. During an epidemic of cholera she had shown the greatest devotion, had begged alms from the greengrocers, given medicine to the sick in their attics, taken in orphans and helped rebels to escape during the Commune. "Madame Saint Vincent de Paul," said he, quoting a dithyrambic pamphlet from which he had acquired all these facts. But there were other details, less public, which he alone knew. Lowering his voice, as though he were relating something confidential, and winking his eyes maliciously, he added that there were certain ladies of high position who made her their accomplice when they wanted to get rid of their bastards. Nowadays, you know, these things were not so easily managed as they used to be. Besides, she had been the mistress of various important men, bigwigs whose names he could give, if he wanted to. Consequently she was able to get anything she wanted at Court, pardons, everything. Louis-Philippe used to consult her in emergencies. Béranger had referred to her in one of his songs, and

the Government, in deference to public opinion, had decorated her. What a fine woman! She was buried in her own grave with a very simple stone cross, in the Montparnasse Cemetery, and she had left two or three illegitimate children in the best Parisian homes. From an authoritative source Trudon knew that one of them, at the present time, was a doctor.

"That cannot be!"

Madame Duhamain refused to believe him. Trudon insisted. Well-informed people had assured him that it was so. What possible motive could they have for deceiving him?

For a moment they both became animated. Although she was not a practising Catholic, and merely went to chapel for form's sake on the occasion of a marriage or a funeral, Madame Duhamain could not bear to hear people making fun of the reverend clergy. She looked upon impiety as a proof of a defective education. All that was just "talk," a word she used to describe statements without interest, and stories that seemed to her without importance.

At this point Trudon became dimly aware that he had wasted his effect. During his interminable talk he had rather forgotten Madame Duhamain, and what he had hoped to get from her. When she burst out, expressing her doubts and making reservations, he felt that she was again about to escape from him. He, therefore, changed his tone.

Well, after all, he was merely repeating what had been repeated to him. They were not different from

other people; they were made of our common clay. Then, very sweetly and with amorous inflections, he murmured:

"It is surely right to love what is beautiful and to desire what is good."

As he spoke, he stretched out his arm under the table, and with a slow caress he passed his hand over Madame Duhamain's knees.

At first she did not move, thinking that her skirt or petticoat had got ruffled, that the starched tablecloth had chanced to touch her dress. Trudon, irritated by her silence, became bolder and squeezed her a little. She drew back her chair with a sudden movement.

"What sort of conduct is that?"

"What is wrong?"

"You know very well. Don't do that again."

Trudon pretended to be surprised, and declared that he could not understand what she meant.

"I mean your hand."

His hand! He assured her that he was merely trying to pick up his fork which he had clumsily dropped. That was all. Had he touched her? It was really accidental. At the bottom of his heart he felt relieved, for he was afraid she was going to slap his face.

Dessert was served. In phrases of tortuous galantry Trudon offered Madame Duhamain the choicest fruits spread out amongst the green leaves in the fruit dishes. He compared her skin to the

velvety freshness of peaches, her lips to cherries, her eyes to almonds. As a prudent housewife Madame Duhamain's private reflection was that all these fruits were very expensive. On the previous Friday at the market she had asked the prices of similar fruit, and they had seemed out of all reason. And she quietly began to calculate the amount of the bill. Trudon would have to pay through the nose. This little luncheon would cost him a pretty penny.

He continued to shower gallant attentions. From time to time he would thrust out his spoon and try to steal some of the strawberries which she was eating one by one, as befits the enjoyment of a great delicacy. Invariably she shoved away his arm, defended herself, covering her plate with her hands. The frequency of his attacks finally caused her to lose patience, and she began to threaten him.

If he did not stop she would give him a rap over the knuckles with her knife.

"That would be a gentle punishment," replied Trudon, quite taken aback.

"Just you wait and see. It will hurt more than you think."

Again they were silent. With formal politeness they offered each other the best fruit.

"Look, I think this one is riper."

Trudon offered to crack some nuts for her. They were like children playing at keeping house, as if they were having a doll's dinner. Suddenly Madame Duhamain cried.

"I say! What do you take me for?"

She was angry with Trudon who, tired of playing the gentleman, had just thrust into the bosom of her dress the frilled paper from one of the cakes.

"Now, kindly stop. That is quite enough."

Trudon, however, paid no attention to her ob-jurgations. He arose from the table and went towards her. His lips parted in a silly smile, revealing his very white teeth. He mimicked Madame Duhamain's words, the angry tremor in her voice.

"Now, kindly stop. That is quite enough."

She saw him coming, as she sat back in her chair, with a mingled feeling of astonishment at his daring and a little fear. She was afraid she would not be able to resist him. Trudon approached, with outstretched hand, and a resolute manner. She begged him to stay where he was "for my sake." It was really absurd. Who, looking at him now, would have taken him for a person of some dignity?

For a second he stopped, as if her prayers had touched him. Then, stooping suddenly, he implanted a kiss upon whatever part of her face his mouth happened to touch.

She was furious and sprang to her feet. Stepping back, she slapped his face with her napkin, putting all her strength into the blow. The chair behind her fell, and the noise frightened her. She wanted to shout for help, but for fear of a scandal she stifled the cry that arose to her lips. She dashed towards the door and tried to get out. But the latch was jammed, and resisted her feverish, trembling fingers,

so that she merely succeeded in breaking her nails. She remained there for some time struggling with the lock, while Trudon carefully examined in the mirror his cheek which had a red streak across it reaching to his ear. He kept advancing and receding by turns, twisting and turning his body, screwing up his eyes, in a vain effort to ascertain the exact amount of damage to his face. Then he drew from his pocket a cigar-case in which there was a small mirror, and, turning three-quarter way round, like a woman looking at the hang of a coat on her back, he threw out his chest and murmured in satisfied tones:

"That will be all right. It is nothing."

However, to be on the safe side he poured some water into a glass, dipped the corner of his napkin into it, and carefully bathed his cheek. Then, filled with a desire to be ironical, he spoke to Madame Duhamain who could not get the key to turn in the lock and was still struggling with it.

"May I help you?"

She turned round and saw Trudon washing his wounds.

"Well, you're a nice-looking sight!"

And she burst into a fit of laughter.

Trudon was very much annoyed. He had seen many women, but he had never yet met anyone like this. He did not know what to do, how to act. Perhaps he ought to get angry. The thing having started badly, he thought it more prudent to take the matter as a joke. For the rest, though he was not aware of it, he was experiencing that lassitude

which comes from the laborious accomplishment of a dream, when, in the midst of the difficulties of the undertaking, one begins to realize how distressingly mediocre the results will be. He gently requested Madame Duhamain not to be hard on him.

Was she really angry with him? Did she by any chance suppose . . . ? He did not finish the sentence, conveying an amazing modesty by his reticence.

His tone was so humble, his attitude of amazement and supplication so comical, that Madame Duhamain felt her anger subsiding. He was merely ridiculous. How on earth could she have thought him dangerous? So she began to treat him as a person of no consequence, and in a tone of authority as friendly as though she were talking to a child, she said:

"Come now, enough of this play."

Trudon looked as if he were going to approach her again. She threatened him with the napkin, which she had been careful to pick up again.

"Now, you're not to start that again, you understand?"

She even sat down again, and selecting the largest peach in the dish, with a circular twist of her knife she cut it very cleverly in two, extracting the stone.

"Come, have half of this with me. Be quiet and sit in front of me where I can see you."

Then she exaggerated this contemptuous familiarity by calling him Mr. Cheeky.

He begged her to allow him to put his chair besides

hers. He would be very good, he promised her. She consented, and sitting side by side they were silent. A fly, aroused by the early sunshine, hummed about the room continuously.

Trudon gazed at Madame Duhamain with eyes full of dying desire, an expression of vague regret, the sad attitude peculiar to the grief of idiots. Then, in order to make conversation:

"Let us drink to each other."

When Madame Duhamain was putting down on the table the glass which she had barely touched with her lips for form's sake, Trudon took her hand.

"Oh, are you beginning again?"

"Madame," Trudon repeated in a languishing tone, as he slipped his arm around her waist.

She did not object, but leant back as if she were in an arm-chair. She was not afraid to surrender herself, being now quite sure of herself, and she simulated resistance in order to seem to yield. Trudon's eyes gazed into hers.

"Well, have I changed? I am like all other women, am I not? My nose is in the centre of my face."

He could not bring himself to speak. His lips were paralysed by his increasing rage, which caused the corners of his mouth to twist convulsively. He fancied how his failure would be spread about and become known to everybody. He saw himself made a laughing-stock. He could hear Chanousse making endless fun of his pretensions of being a strong man.

His reputation as a ladies' man was ruined. And all this because of this petty, middle-class woman, silly, stupid and brainless. He felt he would like to smack her. That, at least, would avenge his vanity and relieve his nerves. But he could not bring himself to do it, and contented himself with saying.

"So. . . ."

He stopped, making a pause as actors do before uttering an effective line.

"So, you won't let me."

She drew back and looked at him curiously. She must have found him very funny because a violent fit of mirth caused her whole body to shake. A staccato laugh gurgled in her throat spasmodically, shaking the gold medallion which hung very low from her neck. Without answering directly, but in choking phrases, at intervals, she managed to stammer:

"Not jolly likely. . . . You have come to the wrong place, my dear man, if that's what you thought."

Amidst gasps of laughter she continued a sentence which she had begun in her mind;

"No! Really! It is really a case of 'have you no sense of decency?'"

This was a joke she had read one day in a comic paper, a burlesque term of refusal, which she had got into the habit of repeating on all occasions. This time it seemed to her so appropriate to the situation that she said it two or three times, almost spoiling

its effect. Her anger and contempt had all evaporated. She was frankly amused, as she thought of their silly escapade.

"What children we have been!"

Trudon did not protest, and they fell into silence again.

In the distance of the grey horizon the siren of a steamboat answered the dull clanging of a tramway bell. A few drops of rain pattered against the window panes, broke and flowed down the glass like tears.

"Let us, at least, be friends."

As she seemed to hesitate:

"Do tell me, at least, that you are not angry with me."

Across the table littered with the remains of lunch, Madame Duhamain made a great gesture of denial, one of those gestures of polite indifference which she used to make at home when some clumsy guest broke a liqueur glass or dropped a pat of butter.

No, no. It didn't matter at all. Of course, she would not bear him any ill will. It wasn't worth while.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door.

"Hello! Who is there?"

For a moment Madame Duhamain was afraid they had been discovered, that her husband had unexpectedly arrived. Probably someone had betrayed her. Although she could not see how Duhamain could have got there so quickly from Juvisy, she was pale and trembling, trying to think of the lie she

would invent to protect herself, of the excuse she would have to find. She even began to prepare herself for an attack of hysteria.

"Go on. Open the door."

Her voice sounded feverish and choked, as raucous as that of a child with the croup.

Trudon hesitated, very naturally. He had visions of himself being challenged, insulted and compelled to fight a duel. He had never used a sword, and he was a very poor shot, being excessively short-sighted. Once he had managed to hit a pipe in a suburban shooting-gallery, and then the gun was a rifle! Moreover, he suspected that Duhamain would certainly be accompanied by detectives, who would produce their credentials and arrest them *in flagrante delicto*. In a rapid flight of imagination he could see himself hauled into court, old Chamblé cited as a witness and stammering in front of the judge, half asleep beneath a huge crucifix in a gold frame, while he, the accused, sat between two policemen, and in the background, amongst the audience thirsting for details, his friend Chanousse sneered and made fun of him.

There was another knock, but so discreet, this time, that Trudon felt reassured and decided to open the door. The waiter appeared carrying coffee on a tray. When he saw the embarrassed look of his two customers, the deep red that coloured their cheeks, a smile of satisfaction spread over his crafty face, which was like that of a theological student on

trial for some outrage on public morals. He slyly apologized:

"Perhaps I disturbed the lady and gentleman, but I had my hands full."

"No, no. Not at all," said Madame Duhamain.

"Not at all. Not at all," Trudon repeated.

They simply complained of the heat and begged the waiter to open the windows a little.

As soon as he had gone downstairs again, they took their coffee, in a very serious frame of mind.

Out of a sense of propriety Madame Duhamain did not take the glass of brandy with which she usually helped her digestion. She was already talking of putting on her hat and going, and Trudon was wondering if he ought to detain this "silly fool," this "scatter brain," when a great gust of wind suddenly opened the half-closed window wide, knocking the pane against the wall with a loud noise. At the same time a gust of damp air entered, shaking the curtains and the table-cloth. Madame Duhamain's hat hanging on the peg at the end of the room lost its equilibrium and almost fell. She just caught it in time. Then, coming back to where Trudon stood, they both leaned out of the window and looked at the weather.

The clouds were scurrying from one end of the horizon to the other, from the Tour Saint Jacques on the right to the factory chimneys of Ivry on the left, as far as the eye could reach. A fine rain was falling, filling the eaves, and its noise on the roof was like the clatter of cavalry horses' hoofs. Down the

sides the gutter pipes were spouting with a sound of a throat being gargled. The drains by the roadside were engulfed in a flooding stream, and all along the footpaths there was the splashing of little waterfalls, the stifled murmur of a subterranean torrent. Passengers disembarking from the river steamboat stopped to turn up the ends of their trousers, while an urchin, delighted by the shower, jumped and ran about in the puddles, kicked his legs and splashed the passers-by with dirty water. In corners umbrellas were closed by people in despair at being unable to hold out against the persistent onslaught of the hurricane. From all sides, between the paving-stones, underneath the doorways, a ceaseless stream of water came as from an inexhaustible fountain. Where the ground was uneven, in the middle of the roadway, lakes formed. The palisades were being slowly inundated; water splashed against the wheels of the melancholy yellow buses which passed, continuously beaten by the rain and bespattered with mud.

Madame Duhamain laughed at the stupid appearance of the people on the top of the buses. Huddled against each other, shivering and soaked, they held with both hands umbrellas in distress, which floated above their heads like balloons, yet had the imbricated appearance of crocodile's skin. A mist arose from this deluge and gave to the landscape the vague atmosphere and outline of dream. In the distance the line of the houses was blurred as though about to disappear, and the trees acquired

that confused tint peculiar to photographic negatives. The Pont National, lost in the fog, mingled its grey arches with that melancholy grey of the skies.

Noises arose that sounded as sinister as the last cry of a shipwrecked world. The wind shook the piles of barrels on the quay and swept the banks of the river so furiously that the sentry in his rocking-box had to hold on his képi to prevent it from blowing away. The river broke in green foam against the steps of the jetty, with the motion of real waves on an angry sea. Boats at anchor dragged on their ropes, and at each shock of the waves their sides knocked together and gave forth great groaning noises like the moans of human distress.

Madame Duhamain was particularly struck by the captain of one of the steamboats, who stood erect beneath his sou'wester and submitted to the storm without flinching.

"There's a man who likes fresh air!"

Then she thought of her own plight. How was she to get away?

However much she desired to escape from Trudon, from the stupidity of his conversation, and the brutal audacity of his amorous attempts, she did not feel disposed to set out in that downpour. She did not want to ruin her hat and get soaked to the skin, thank you. She decided to wait. Probably the rain would not last very long.

Trudon also shared that hope. But you could not depend upon it. The rain having begun at noon, he did not think much of the prospect for the rest

of the day. In order to make himself agreeable and to pass the time, he proposed that they should play a game of cards.

No. She preferred to remain as they were, looking out of the window.

"Hello," said Trudon, "the rain is gradually getting heavier."

In effect, the storm had increased. Shutters banged in the distance, slates could be heard falling, making a loud noise in the deserted country-side.

Then all was silent again, a desolating silence broken only at long intervals by the Auvergne accent of an umbrella-vender, a voice of misery and distress, crying his wares below in the damp twilight.

Madame Duhamain asked what time it was. Trudon's watch showed that it was half past four.

"Is that all?"

She spoke the words instinctively, without thinking of their possible impoliteness, they so completely expressed her lassitude and boredom.

Would the day never come to an end?

PART FOUR

PART FOUR

THE rain storm in its fury beat against the front of Les Marronniers, wetting Madame Duhamain's face. The drops which chanced to fall on her hands irritated her still more, while the damp gradually spread over the floor and the cold penetrated the fine cloth of her boots to her feet. Several times already she had moved slightly backwards, to escape the inundation, but she was careful not to touch the arm of Trudon, who was leaning out beside her. Now she had got too close to the wall and the plaster had whitened the right shoulder of her dress. She was on the point of shutting the window when a squad of soldiers appeared in the midst of the muddy solitude of the quay, quite undisturbed by the storm.

With their rifles on their shoulders and the straps of their busbies making a black line against the whiteness of their shaven chins, tightly buttoned up in their dripping greatcoats, five men advanced. In the middle marched another soldier, in tunic and képi, with a meditative and dejected air. A white linen bag was hung at his left side. Solemnly all six approached without accelerating their pace, as if on parade, apparently indifferent to the fury of the storm; the one resigned, the others mechanical.

"Oh, my goodness! Why are they taking him away?"

Trudon explained that he was a military prisoner. Probably he had got into a fight, or had stolen something, or perhaps he had even insulted his superior officers. They were probably taking him to the Cherche-Midi prison. Then for a long time, seized with an incomprehensible interest in the subject, in order to fill in the time, Trudon and Madame Duhamain racked their brains to discover what could have been the offence of which the poor devil was guilty, the crime of which he was accused. Trudon explained various possible cases. In authoritative tones he quoted the penalties of the military code, credited the unknown soldier with imaginary perversities, with hypothetically serious delinquencies, and carried away by the horror of his own suppositions, he became indignant, and finally demanded extreme penalties, which would serve as a warning and maintain discipline.

As an ex-corporal of militia he felt himself almost a real soldier because he had once tried to get promotion into the territorial army. Although it was established beyond a doubt that, during the battle of Buzenval, he had spent the whole day at Rueil, selling spirits and playing billiards, far from his battalion which had had a serious engagement with the enemy, he affected warlike sentiments, and made a point of cherishing an incredible hatred for the Prussians. He had even abandoned his favourite café, though the beer was excellent, because customers

had come there who spoke German. He went so far as to call people whom he did not like Bismarck, thinking that he thus gave them evidence of his superior and supreme contempt.

On the evenings which his business and his amorous affairs left free, he used to absorb himself in heroic literature. He did not disdain the poets, those who proceeded by way of invective to soothe the soul with insults, and those of the more refined variety who melt the soul with sentimentalities. Just before he fell asleep his enthusiasm could be aroused by bad verse which celebrated the deeds of buglers mortally wounded but continuing to sound the charge. He adored the great ladies, disguised as Red Cross nurses, who were represented in alexandrines as selling their last jewels to free their native land. Another even more lyrical spirit wanted to marry a girl from Châteaudun, and when he had made her pregnant, declared his conviction that he was the father of heroes. Trudon approved of him. Then, without any transition, he returned to more serious works. A writer had gone to Germany; it was said that he spoke only of what he had seen there with his own eyes, and his observations were supposed to be exceedingly accurate. Trudon had borrowed this book, and its exaggeration of natural things, its constant determination to belittle, its excess of general conclusions drawn from particular facts, the very narrowness of its main outlines, responded to the most exalted sentiments of Trudon's chauvinistic soul. He constantly reread it and

thought of buying it. He thought it was well written and very readable. Above all, it was the work of an avenger!

This Platonic preoccupation with revenge expressed itself even in the details of his clothing. In the house he wore embroidered slippers on the left foot of which Lorraine, and on the right Alsace, were represented in national costume and in tears, a tri-coloured cockade in the bosom of the dress, while across a framework of green hops the following motto was worked in yellow wool: "She waits." This patriotic footwear, symbolizing his regrets and destined to keep alive his wrath, was the daily delight of his charwoman. At the big military reviews, when the cuirassiers filed past, he acclaimed them warmly, as though he recognized in each soldier a survivor of Reichshofen. Thus the genuine importance which he attached to stereotyped words expressing mediocre ideas, the waste of nervous energy in warlike imaginings and bloody dreams, left him frightened and cowardly in the presence of the harsh demands of reality. He perpetually repeated: "What is needed is audacity," a phrase which meant nothing to him but success, without any reference to the difficulties or to ways and means.

His theories, however, did not succeed in convincing Madame Duhamain. Yes, of course, what he said was true. She also shared that opinion, and so did Duhamain. But who could tell? Perhaps that soldier had done nothing, and military authorities are often so ridiculous. Her tender feminine heart

was profoundly touched, and with pitying eyes she followed the poor devil who was marching off in the distance surrounded by bayonets that glistened in the rain. She could not help feeling that he was the victim of intolerable vexations. Evidently he had been exasperated. He had resisted insolent orders; her pity was stirred; her sympathies increasingly overpowered her, exaggerating the injustices and causing her to dream vaguely of fate.

The squad was disappearing, growing smaller as it got further away. Madame Duhamain leaned out of the window and could just barely see the busbies. For a second she thought she saw them near a big tree, then some distance on, beside a pile of timber. She thought she saw them turning the corner of a street where a tall house had a grey overcoat painted on its gable end by way of a sign. Then nothing more could be seen.

The melancholy and deserted quay now stretched out its length indefinitely. Here and there puddles gleamed, the dark roadway was broken here and there by horse manure, and beyond the wavering line of milestones the Seine, green as a stream of pus, flowed on toward the dark horizon where everything was lost to view.

Madame Duhamain shut the window and, turning round, saw the private room and Trudon! Having given up all hope, he had finally stretched out on the divan and was lounging there as if he were at home. He had unbuttoned his waistcoat and his shirt protruded out of the opening, which was held only by

his watch chain, his huge gold chain of aldermanic dimensions. Beating time with his right leg, which was crossed over the left, his knee bent on a level with his chin, and with his hands crossed behind his head, he was whistling the Romance from "Mignon," his favourite opera, in a manner that was at once discreet, sentimental and vulgar.

Then Madame Duhamain definitely decided that he was a fool and she regretted more than ever the soldier who had passed a short while before and had enabled her to forget her melancholy plight, the horrible predicament into which she had been landed by her fatal demand for the ideal.

Outside, the rain was still falling. She could not really think of going home in such weather. She was not properly clad; her boots would let in the water at once. And her dress would be irrevocably ruined, even if the people downstairs lent her an umbrella. To add to her misfortunes, there was not a cab on the stand outside, nor even the shadow of one on the horizon. What luck?

The advancing twilight lent an indecisive colour to everything. In the middle of the room the hanging lamp stand, full of flowers, seemed to be draped in spiders' webs. The bright flowers on the wallpaper lost their distinctive colours and took on a uniform grey. Daylight was gradually receding. Having collapsed in a chair, Madame Duhamain watched the light fade in turn from the varnish of the furniture, the label of a bottle, and the metal of the hat-rack. For a moment it lingered on the silver of a

tea spoon, then moved to the mirror, as if to take refuge there. But it was driven from the gilt frame and, harassed by the increasing darkness until it was reduced to the dimensions of a star, it grew still smaller and glittered for another moment. Suddenly even that diminutive light paled, and then there was nothing. The star was extinguished and night had come.

Madame Duhamain had a feeling of immense sadness. The departing daylight had increased her loneliness, and added to her boredom so much that her very will seemed paralysed. Having neither the strength to stay nor the courage to escape, she remained where she was, half dead in her chair, amidst the gathering darkness. From time to time the rumbling of a bus along the quay made the badly fitting window panes rattle. The darkness around them seemed to tremble. Then, when the bus had passed, the rattle of a spoon in a glass died down and Trudon could again be heard.

He was there, plunged in the shadows; nothing of him was visible, except an occasional flash when he changed the position of his right hand and his diamond ring caught a stray shaft of light. His entire person was lost in the darkness, and from this vague mass Mignon's song, rendered more sonorous by the prevailing silence, arose in a shrill and delicate murmur.

Madame Duhamain also knew the tune. She often used to play it on the piano for her husband. He thought it very touching, "rotten with sentiment,"

and beating time with his paper, he would indicate fine shades of interpretation. "Be careful, Ernestine, when you come to her return." In her depression the words of the poem recurred to Madame Duhamain's mind. Involuntarily she fitted the words to the notes emerging from the invisible mouth of Trudon.

Connais-tu le pays où fleurit l'oranger?

She mechanically sang the words to herself.

Le pays des fruits d'or et des roses vermeilles.

But when he came to the refrain Trudon, as was his enthusiastic habit, increased the sound and Madame Duhamain followed him with

C'est là que je voudrais vivre,

and raised her voice also without noticing it. Suddenly she stopped short, overwhelmed with confusion at hearing herself sing out loud:

Vivre, aimer et mourir.

Then she lost her temper. No, really it was too stupid. Good heavens! Would they never be able to go? She got up, gesticulating in the dark, and, running to the window, she pulled aside the curtains.

The panes were wet and she could see nothing. She rubbed the mist off with her hand. Through the obscure opening thus made, curious lights were visible, so confused that they seemed a long way off. The lamps on the Quai d'Ivry had just been lighted, and their rays were reflected in the Seine, looking like fairy architecture, a regular colonnade of fire. The rain kept falling persistently, furiously. Madame Duhamain tried to see the sky. It looked black

and starless. The wind still blew. She came and sat down again, in utter despair. Trudon was still lying on the divan in the dark, but he was now whistling another tune.

In the meantime a vast sympathy for the imprisoned couple had developed in the public dining-room downstairs. The chef, in his white cap, and the sleepy waiter chatting to the lady from the cash desk who was seated at a table embroidering, as if she were a customer, had ceased to be amused by the situation. Their smutty jokes had been finally exhausted. They were all now agreed that, once the main business was over, the couple upstairs must feel pretty foolish sitting there looking at each other, with not a word to say. How could they pass the time?

"They can return to the charge, by God," said the cellarer, an old soldier, who was passing with his black apron, and a lighted candlestick in his hand. The men doubted this, and the cash lady blushed.

"Oh! Massucot!" she cried in a reproachful tone.

But Massucot had disappeared, followed by the cat, which had left its place beside the city directory. He had descended again into the cellar and no longer answered, being absorbed in the work of reducing the alcoholic content of the older blends. The proprietor smiled in a dignified manner, with pursed-up lips, pretending not to hear the lewd comments of his staff upon the patrons of his establishment. In fact, he privately enjoyed them. He had lit one of the gas-jets, and bored by the depressing atmosphere of the

day, he was trying unusual shots on the billiard table, endeavouring to invent new strokes, and tiring himself by screwing with incredible force, which was destined to astonish the players and arouse the ambitions of the onlookers.

With cue in hand, he followed the geometrical course of the balls around the green cloth. He moved his shoulders, drew back suddenly, twisted, made faces to help along the cannons, and kept saying all the usual phrases, as if there were a large crowd of spectators. "Look out there!" "I have got it," "neatly touched," "there is room behind," "too much side," "if it will carry," "it has touched the three sides," "what a fine position!" And he counted his points out loud. He addressed the balls as if they were living creatures, objurgating them violently, encouraging them tenderly, treating them by turns abusively and in suppliant terms. "Go on, you beauty! Go on!" Sometimes, to help them along, he would blow upon them, as was the traditional joke.

Nevertheless, he was worried about Trudon and Madame Duhamain. He remembered that such adventures were not rare. It was not the first time that two lovers had been confined in his house all day by the rain. At the bottom of his heart, he was glad of it. Once he had exploited them in his business capacity, once his bill was paid, he disapproved of them, as a moral man, who sees in every misfortune an obvious manifestation of Providence. While

meditating a stroke and carefully chalking the tip of his cue, he remarked casually:

"Those people upstairs must be rather bored. Take some newspapers to them, Victor."

Then he leaned over the table, lifting his left leg, and the grumbling of the waiter was lost in the crash of the balls cannoning.

"You might also ask them if they intend to dine here," he added, feeling so pleased at his skill that he became witty. He turned his back to the table, slipped the cue through his arms behind his back, and thrust forward his stomach.

"Another for us," he said on seeing the balls meet as they bounded from the cushions.

"Heh, watch out there, red! Almost did it. If I hadn't put so much side on." Then, completely satisfied with himself and tired by the sheer monotony of his kill, he threw the cue full length upon the table, stifled a yawn with one hand, and mechanically tapped the glass with the other.

On the dial of the barometer, streaked with a gilt design, the thin needle of bluish steel did not move. He tapped several times. It remained obstinately at "stormy." Well, there was no use worrying further. The weather was not going to pick up that day.

"That rain will last all night," said the waiter. Then he regretted his imprudence in not bringing his umbrella with him in the morning, and as he appeared and disappeared with the papers up the wind-

ing staircase, everyone predicted that he would be soaked getting home that evening.

"Soaked to the skin," old Chamblé added, making the evil prophecies worse.

A new stroke having occurred to him, he went back to the billiard table. The darkness was more intense, so he turned the gas higher, and having placed the balls in very difficult positions, he resumed his experiments. His hand was in, he was very sure of himself and never missed a stroke. Upstairs the waiter had entered the private room and as he opened the door the continuous crash of a cannon could be heard.

"Here is something to entertain you," he said, placing the papers on the table, one after the other. Then he struck a match on the seat of his trousers and went up to the gas-jet. The insecure burner lit up with a hissing sound in the midst of the frosted globe. A yellow light flamed sadly. In the depressing light the springs of the sofa relaxed with a metallic noise. Trudon had jumped up from his lying posture, and begun to button his waiscoat. His shirt protruded above the red flannel belt which he wore as a hygienic measure, and he stuffed it in, as he stood before the mirror running his fingers through his hair. His cheek was still smarting, and he went closer to the glass and contemplated it anxiously for a long time. However, after careful examination, the scratch seemed to grow less noticeable. A little powder in the morning and it would not be seen. This thought gave him great relief and he began to

stretch his arms, rub his hands and go through various motions expressive of satisfaction. Madame Duhamain could not make head or tail of all this, and thought that Trudon had gone mad. He no longer struck her as ridiculous.

She did not move.

"Is it still raining, waiter?"

He replied that it was.

"Ah."

Trudon felt called upon to declare that it was a fine drop of rain. He was about to continue in this vein, when a dull thud made him stop. Downstairs a heavy body could be heard falling and rebounding over the tiles, making the wooden pillars crack. In his enthusiasm over a decisive stroke old Chamblé had made a ball jump the cushions of the billiard table.

"He is steeple-chasing," said the waiter wittily.

Trudon expressed anxiety, hoping that it was not his cue that was being used.

Madame Duhamain pretended to find the matter very serious, and wanted him to go and see. She hoped in this way to get rid of him, at least for a moment. She insisted.

"Oh, go on. You can go downstairs. Don't mind me. I'll look at the pictures."

She had gone to the table and was pretending to choose one of the illustrated magazines, deciphering their titles, which were inscribed in letters of gold on moleskin covers, on which glistened five copper nails set in at regular intervals and worn by continual

rubbing. Finally she made her choice and opened one at random, repeating:

"Please don't mind me."

But Trudon would not leave her alone. He tried to convince himself that all was not over. His mind was still haunted by vague hopes. He began to count upon chance, on something utterly unforeseen which was bound to happen in his favour. Presently Madame Duhamain would surely fall into his arms. Why not? One never can tell. Women are so changeable. He was afraid he was going to allow an opportunity to pass and perhaps the most favourable of all. Then as his vanity gradually reasserted itself he said no: he was not going to leave the last word with her. He had plenty of time to play billiards during the week. If they did use his cue, although it suited him perfectly, was well balanced and light—let them ruin it. He could get another. It was not an irreparable loss.

"Are you not going down?" Madame Duhamain asked. She could not overcome his obstinacy. Since she was so anxious for him to go, he would remain. So there! Delighted to discover how obnoxious he was to her, he declared that he, too, would read the papers. It just so happened that he had not had time to see what was in the morning paper. He had missed it.

"Do you wish anything else?" the waiter asked, when he had cleared the table. They were silent.

"Are you dining here?"

Again there was silence. The gas-jet hissed con-

tinuously and irritatingly behind the frosted globe.

Trudon plucked up his courage.

"Are we dining here?" he asked, turning to Madame Duhamain.

Her face was covered with blushes. So now he was insulting her in public. He said: "Are we dining?" as if their interests were identical and their lives joined. The very words were those used by Duhamain when they were detained in the suburbs in the evening by some distant expedition. And in this inelegant formula the exasperated Madame Duhamain saw, as it were, the taking possession of her person. A brutal violation of her personality. In her heart she was revolted. Indeed! Did Trudon think he had any rights over her? Vague insults arose to her lips, and she almost shouted that she did not belong to him, that she forbade him to speak to her so familiarly. "Do you understand, you idiot?"

The hasty words came to her mouth and she would certainly have replied to this question which she considered an insult, when the waiter appeared. He stood there, his arms full of a pile of dirty dishes which reached up to his chin, and with a stupid expression he awaited orders. Madame Duhamain, however, noticed in his face an expression of profound irony, and fancied that he was enjoying her embarrassment.

Then she understood. Evidently the whole restaurant believed that she had given herself to Trudon. How persuade them to the contrary? She could never find a plausible reason to justify herself. Ap-

pearances were against her. Does an honest woman shut herself up with a man in a private room? Who would believe that she had defended her virtue and victoriously resisted? Her modesty would seem fictitious; she would be made ridiculous and, besides, she would be denounced as a prude and a hypocrite. So the best thing was to resign herself to the worst, to put up with the consequences of her escapade to the bitter end. And when Trudon repeated his question: "Are we dining here?" she decided to answer nicely, as if they were two lovers delighted with each other:

"Would you care to, dearest?"

Trudon declared emphatically that he did not.

"And you?"

No, neither did she. She was not hungry. In an excess of condescension she gave her reasons, drawing attention to the fact that they had lingered a long while over lunch.

"There is nothing else you want?" asked the waiter.

They hesitated, feeling ashamed to stay a whole afternoon in a restaurant without ordering anything.

"What about a little *apéritif*? Does that appeal to you?"

Madame Duhamain consented. Yes, she would take something sweet, a grenadine, for instance. He ordered an absinthe.

"With water?" the waiter asked, as he went out.

"Yes, with sugar and water."

"With water, all right!" And as he went downstairs he shouted:

"One grenadine and one plain absinthe, one!"

Then he disappeared. Madame Duhamain had again become silent. In the stillness of the room the gas-jet, with its defective burner, continued to hiss.

"That thing is out of order," said Trudon.

Madame Duhamain pretended not to hear him. He repeated himself, being anxious to renew the conversation.

"Have you a pin, by any chance?"

She obstinately kept silence. He added:

"If you had a pin I could fix it," nodding at the gas-jet.

As Madame Duhamain refused absolutely to speak, he also was reduced to silence. Downstairs the noise of the billiard balls increased, irritating and tempting him. For an instant he felt like going down, taking off his coat and playing a game of fifty with old Chamblé. He restrained himself, however, and finally, for want of something better, he decided to read his paper. He looked for it, but his favourite sheet was missing, having been taken away by a local conservative who got it from the café at half-rates and came for it himself every day. He used to run over it as he walked through the streets and, when he reached home, he would read it aloud to his domestic circle. They all thought highly of the paper which provided them with pretentious formulæ in which to express the innate poverty of their ideas.

Trudon, also, could not live without it. He regarded its writers as oracles, sometimes deplored their weakness, but repeated entire phrases from their articles, thinking that he thereby showed great freedom of mind and considerable common sense. He even wrote to Sarcey from time to time, consulting him on doubtful points, drawing his attention to abuses and denouncing the sinister machinations of the clergy.

He upset the pile of newspapers, picking them up and throwing them down by turns.

"What are you looking for?" Madame Duhamain asked, for he finally got on her nerves.

"*Le XIX^e Siècle.*"

She began to look for it, but he was clearly right; it was missing. Trudon, who felt utterly lost, refused in succession *Le Rappel*, *Le Temps* and *La République Française*.

Madame Duhamain offered him *Le Pays* of the previous day.

He became indignant. Cassagnac, in his opinion, was a damned swine. He ought to be transported to Cayenne.

"Will you have *Le Gaulois*, then?"

Those papers were all in the hands of the same gang.

"Well, *Le Figaro*?"

Did she think he could read such a filthy rag? It was read by every kept woman in Paris, and in an excess of prudery he confessed that he could not understand how the Government allowed such papers to circulate. By so doing, they corrupted public

taste in the long run. Did they think we were still under the Empire?

As he had been an inordinate consumer of newspapers all his life, he believed that monarchies were naturally depraved and that democracies were morally superior! The authoritarian zeal which slumbers in the bosom of all republicans was aroused, and he invoked the principles of 1789 and declared that they were threatened. In short, he held that silence should be imposed by force upon those who professed principles contrary to his own. For example, a mob ought to storm the offices of *Le Figaro* and smash up the presses. Of course, he could not lead such adventures, but contented himself with wishing that they might take place, being resolved to take no part in them but to rejoice if they turned out favourably. Meanwhile, that paper was never read, he said, and all decent people agreed that it shouldn't be. Delighted at being able to annoy him, Madame Duhamain defended *Le Figaro*. It was amusing and told such stories! Did he really not want it?

"No."

"All right. Please yourself. I will read it."

Trudon thought her unspeakably stupid and her obstinacy in the worst of taste. Sick and tired of their conversation, he began to walk up and down the room. Every now and then he would stop in a corner, apparently reflecting, or he would develop a profound interest in one of the two flowers on the wall-paper and examine it curiously. This flower

attracted him every time, he could not tell why, and each time he stood longer in front of it, scratching it with his nail, as if he thought he could discover something behind it. Then he would resume his monotonous walking up and down.

Meanwhile Madame Duhamain could not succeed in occupying her mind. Her boredom increased and the newspapers merely aggravated it.

First there were the political journals. She skimmed them one after the other. Lengthy columns succeeded each other, some praising Thiers, others ridiculing him. They accused each other of bad faith, by turns, and the same arguments were advanced to prove contrary things. Some advocated energetic action, others, for the same reason, counselled moderation, and the uniformly exaggerated style concealed beneath its over-emphasis the indifference of money-lenders, stock-brokers and business men who were subordinating the affairs of the State to Stock Exchange speculations, turning France upside down to their own advantage, and overturning Ministries in order to ensure bonuses and the payment of dividends. In the long run they all became identical in the equality of stupidity, their admiration for Victor Hugo's latest book, their enthusiasm for the same musical-comedy star, their support of the same patent medicines, their praise of the same charming colleague who had just finished a play in five acts which was, of course, to be produced at the Comédie Française.

Trudon was in a thoughtful mood. Now that his dreams had collapsed, he found them utterly absurd, and could not resist calling himself a booby and a fool. What stupid impulse had led him to try to seduce this affected and grimacing little creature? Through what aberration had he been led to desire her? When he tried to discover by what process of reasoning he had come to attempt to make Madame Duhamain his mistress, he was amazed at his lack of intelligence, and irritated by the crass idiocy of the project. It was not even as if he were in need of love at the time. He always had a woman on tap, for regularly, once a week, he received a visit from an honest wench, an excellent bedfellow, who was always smiling and most inexpensive. Instead of wasting his time with this prude, who was always on the defensive, how much better he would have done to write to Gabrielle, who was always so willing to let him enjoy a whole day of her depraved body and the refined debauchery of her caresses! Whenever he wanted her, she arrived punctually, without a complaint or an argument. In his tender moments he called her Bielle. She wore no corset, to please him, and was full of attentions, bringing him bouquets of violets for his blue china vases, on which his initials were worked, and a lemon in her pocket for the punch which they drank together from the same glass. On one occasion, in a burst of affection, she had given him a more considerable present. It was a silk tobacco pouch, one of those complicated affairs upon which the affectionate bad taste

of women prompts them to waste their efforts: a multicoloured mixture of triangles, lozenges and circles, lined with pearls, adorned with tassels. Lying upon the table of a café, it combined the shape of a Greek bonnet with the gay colours of a Chinese lantern. At that moment Trudon was making a cigarette from it, and his thoughts inevitably turned from the pouch to its donor, whom he was comparing to Madame Duhamain.

Ah, how much nicer Bielle was! That girl knew some amusing songs; meals and parties in her company were never dull. He even recalled her little peculiarities, which had all irritated him, but now, in retrospect, they seemed charming, even her obstinacy in keeping on the eiderdown quilt in summer, when the heat was at its worst, even her habit of kissing him on the ear in a playful but noisy fashion which made him jump.

Trudon stopped, enjoying his memories and thinking of the women he had seen undressed. He had rolled his cigarette, and went to light it at the gas-jet. But, in his anxiety to preserve appearances, he stopped and asked:

"May I smoke? Will it disturb you?"

"My husband smokes," replied Madame Duhamain without looking up.

In the illustrated papers she saw the latest coronation, the dirty linen washed in the latest lawsuit, all the events of Paris and the world: tramcars upset by trains, families bereaved by floods, shipwrecks reproduced according to survivors' narratives and

great men reproduced by the camera. Pictures which were successful at last year's Salon were presented with particular care. She gazed at these. They were usually scenes from the war of 1870. The French troops, with fixed bayonets, charged forward and, as the patriotism of the artists did not permit them to show the Prussians as more than a hazy background, their valour seemed to consist in attacking the landscape. Underneath sonnets were printed, explaining the subjects, telling the story, combining lyricism with profound thought. Madame Duhamain was astonished at the names of the authors, so obscure was their evident fame. She mused over one of them, however. Where had she seen that name? She racked her brains. Ah, now she remembered! He was more celebrated, he had signed verses in the *Bon Marché* almanac, in the middle of the advertisements. Then, as though this feat of memory had relieved her, she turned the page. Whole pages on both sides were filled from top to bottom with generals, their plumed helmets and their horses. Recently married royalties displayed their stupid smiles and the stiffness of the omnipotent. A gentleman with an intelligent face was the subject of special comment. He had won the prize for pigeon-shooting at Monaco. Then she looked at battles: missionaries attacked by savages, savages massacred by the armies of Christendom. She was distressed by the uniform decorum of these scenes of carnage, always arranged in the same manner, with the same corpse crumpled up beside a drum in

the foreground and the wounded man with a piteous prayer in his eyes. Madame Duhamain took up some other papers, the fashionable and amusing magazines, but she was interrupted by the arrival of the waiter.

He brought in the drinks which they had ordered. He had poured them out beforehand, so that at each step he took something red on his right or something green on his left danced in the glasses arranged on both sides of a carafe placed upon a tray.

"Will that be all?" he asked.

He waited and the liquid in the glasses on the table had time to settle. Trudon asked him to get them a cab.

"We want one, don't we?" he said, turning to Madame Duhamain.

She did not understand. She wondered what use a cab would be. What did Trudon propose to do? Where was he going to take her? Home, perhaps. But it was still too early, she could not arrive home at that hour. And then, suppose someone were to see them! What would the neighbours say? But it was also evident that they could not stay there eternally staring at each other like wooden images. So she fell in with his suggestion. She did not want to argue, and the thought of going anywhere for a change was attractive. She had no difficulty in saying:

"As you like, dear."

The waiter went out and Trudon seized the carafe.

"Excuse me," said he, "this is my job," and he mixed the drinks.

First he poured the water into the grenadine, a simple operation, but when it came to his absinthe his precautions were elaborate. He dropped the water through the sugar in single drops and when the cloudy green mixture gradually filled up he declared it perfectly harmless, in spite of what people said. "Fixed" in this way, absinthe, according to him, was less dangerous than grenadine. He went on talking, but his words had no relation to his thoughts. Mentally he continued to make comparisons, entirely absorbed in his memories of women.

Gabrielle was not the only one. In a revulsion of feeling against his disappointment, he put them all above Madame Duhamain. With strange satisfaction he recalled passing adventures, meetings in the street, going upstairs in the darkness while women who had forgotten their matches took him by the hand and led him to their rooms. He remembered nights spent in small apartments where the morning sun showed unfinished work on the sewing-table, heaps of underwear and leather purses, and amorous dialogues concerning the initials in gilt paper stuck inside his hat.

"Hello! A. T. Those are my initials too."

"Is your name Alice?"

"No. Albertine."

"Albertine what?"

"Albertine Thivet. And yours is Alfred, isn't it? I bet your name is Alfred."

He said yes, with a kiss, blew out the candle and their idyll continued in the dark.

Suddenly various adventures came back to him as clearly as if they were just happening. One evening he accosted a woman in the street, in the dark shadow of a closed shop. She asked him what he did, and then, seduced apparently by his position as a wine-dealer, she had gone off with him. There was no concierge where she lived, and she opened the door by pulling a latch which she reached through the railings; then they got inside; amidst the heavy aroma of a pork-butcher's shop, she related a series of misfortunes that were positively laughable! A husband who was drunk the day they were married and upset the ink-bottle at the town hall all over her white dress, and who died later of delirium tremens.

"I suppose all this doesn't interest you much? You must find me a terrible chatterbox."

He assured her of the contrary.

Thus encouraged, she proceeded to confide in him the details of a great burglary when, during her absence, thieves had entered and stolen the Cross of the Legion of Honour belonging to her father, a retired lieutenant-colonel. Trudon's gentlemanly manners aroused her highest hopes, and she credited him with having influential social position. He did not undeceive her, and when they were in bed she hastily asked him to use his influence to get her appointed tenant of a tobacco shop. As an officer's daughter, she was entitled to it, and they had told her that the department concerned had filed her application.

These things were amusing at least! Trudon always heard funny stories in these adventures. He liked listening to the chatter of women and found it interesting. They all complained of their fate, their lovers, their landlords, and hoped to win the first prize in a lottery. Those who had been married cursed their husbands. Some had tried to commit murder in an excessive burst of tenderness; others had attempted to poison themselves with matches because of unrequited love; others had struggled to remain honest women. Some professed to be entirely satisfied with themselves; others produced their photograph albums and showed signs of repentance. Many of them used to talk of their children, of their workshop, of Saint Lazare, and Trudon, with the careless cruelty of a child, found fun and interest in this invariable chronicle of feminine misery. But with this creature . . . He looked at Madame Duhamain with a gesture of contempt.

She went on turning the pages, stopping now and then to gaze at the little illustrations carefully inserted in the text: the minute silhouettes of women hanging affectedly on the arms of serious cavaliers; horsewomen in flowing habits trotting in the avenues of what vaguely suggested the Bois de Boulogne. In the middle of the magazine, there was a huge plate, filling two pages, in which were shown women twisting in strange attitudes, lying down and curled up, slim as dressmaker's models, looking like dolls, and incredibly tall. Dresses were raised and showed stockings marked above the garter with broad stripes.

Lovers were kissing at the piano, and in the corners women in very low-necked dresses were leaning forward listening to conversations whose lewd purport could easily be guessed.

All the articles were about society women.

Questions of housekeeping and the care of children were also treated amidst these pictures of loud fashions, and there was a combined atmosphere of cooking and patchouli in these fashionable apartments, furnished with the exaggerated luxuriousness and vulgar elegance of a brothel. Phrases full of double meaning passed before the eyes of Madame Duhamain and she smiled feebly at the *risqué* situations, the discreetly smutty stories. From one end to the other, the pages of the magazine reflected an extraordinary picture of society, in which every individual, doubtless impelled by a peculiar organism, all inevitably counts, marquises, baronesses and canonesses, attachés or cavalry officers, had no other business in life but writing love letters and kissing furtively behind their fans, filled with an endless enthusiasm for race-horses and beauty spots, always beautifully polite, with gardenias in their button-holes, exquisitely gloved and audacious, the men climbing innumerable park walls to enjoy a moment with a married woman, some ideally misunderstood soul, and delighted to fight duels, just to establish a record, with pianists as witnesses.

Love was exalted and delicacy rendered even more refined. Adultery was excused while meeting-places and their surprises were praised. Madame Duhamain

passed over these hastily, making grimaces of incredulity and contempt, although it was always the woman who came out best in these invariably similar stories.

She turned to the advertisements of corsets which supported the waist, made it more slender, or developed it, as required; of dressmakers unanimously recommended by the powers that be; of inventors of sovereign remedies which strengthened tissue, removed pimples, and sweetened the breath. Pedicurists and midwives were recommended in poetic language; a moralist emitted aphorisms on life; preparations were offered for the intimate care of the body.

Madame Duhamain raised her glass of grenadine to her lips and drank a mouthful abstractedly. Then she listened attentively, for it seemed to her she had heard a cab stop outside. She was mistaken and resumed her reading. It was only the rain rattling against the dark window panes. Trudon kept walking up and down mechanically. She compared him to a bear in the pit at the Zoo, and the notion caused her to smile imperceptibly.

Trudon was still entertaining himself with the memory of previous adventures. He had a good time the night he went to see the woman who owned the military bookshop at Vincennes. He had picked her up during the four minutes' railway journey from the Bastille to Reuilly. He could still see the room behind the shop, with the gas-jet above the table covered with oil-cloth, a drooping begonia in a pot on the

writing-desk, and on the walls a collection of butterflies in dusty glass cases, surmounted by plaster medallions of the kings of France, side by side in a frame. He felt rather timid on arriving. Two neighbours who were calling arose discreetly and left with a wink, leaving them alone. How they had kissed! And what a delightful scandal they had both created at a ball in the Parc d'Italie! What a rush there was to dance with her because of her way of waltzing on tiptoes and letting herself go with passionate abandon! All the officers' wives envied her and behind the fluttering of cheap fans ill-natured gossip was whispered about her all night. She was completely dressed in evening dress, whereas the others all lacked something: slippers, silk stockings, a jewel or a piece of lace. The jealousy which she aroused had its repercussion on Trudon, this civilian whom the soldiers, in defence of their profession and their spouses, affected to treat in a manifestly provocative fashion. She had a delicate skin, that woman. That very evening at the ball she had somehow bruised herself and her shoulder had turned blue. In a café Trudon had tried to hide the bruises with billiard chalk which he powdered with his knife. Ah, that was a tender skin, so soft that he finally took advantage of it by pinching her arms and leaving marks on them, a proof of his affections.

He also regretted her, in spite of the thirty-five years to which she was never ashamed to confess. He regretted the spicy attraction of her mature body and even the ingenuous remarks with which she

flavoured her surrenders. "Would you like me to give myself to you?" A captain of the line had taken her away from him before he had got tired of her, and this day he felt the melancholy of his loss.

He did not deny that these affairs had been pretty cheap, but the memory of them, at that moment, gave a new and delightful savour to his past loves. It had all been so easy! For the first time he realized that all manifestations of sexual pleasure are alike, its effusions eternally commonplace, and he preferred all his old mistresses to Madame Duhamain. He had counted on modest indecencies, on a well-calculated surrender, but now everything ended in a categorical refusal. He wished he could get away. In spite of himself, the continued presence of this woman had stirred his senses, and he would have liked to go off and find elsewhere more simple satisfactions, a less retarded accomplishment of his desires.

He, too, listened attentively to the noises of the street.

"Is that a cab?" he asked.

There was not a sound outside, but the downpour in the darkness. Madame Duhamain did not even deign to reply.

He drank a sip of absinthe and repeated: "Is that the cab?"

"I don't think so," replied Madame Duhamain finally, as she began again to look at the pictures in the magazines.

Amongst the illustrated papers there had strayed a

copy of the *Journal du Havre*, which was full of accounts of shipwrecks and disasters at sea. Madame Duhamain could not but be moved by the sight of the black crosses placed at the head of numerous paragraphs of small type. They indicated catastrophes, strandings, total losses and even ordinary accidents. She was heart-broken by the wreck of the *Sainte Marie Mère de Dieu*, which had sunk on her return from a fishing-trip. There was other information of a less terrifying order: shipping-rates, soap-prices, the oil-market, tenders of copper plates for repairs. She also read the advertisement of a gentleman who acted as counsel for the stray dogs of the town. But this bored her so much that she returned to the other papers, to those which she was accustomed to consider amusing.

She saw the picture of a woman, eternally the same, with uniformly protruding breasts and tangled curls, her mouth indicated by a streak, her eyes by a shadow, her body invisible. Accordingly as she wore tights, a dress or a dressing-gown, she was a show girl, an honest housewife or a courtesan. Whether dressed or undressed, sitting or standing, at table or in bed, her anatomy was always defective, she was leered at by a monkey-like gentleman wearing a monocle, she talked with the same friend, exchanging profound thoughts with the same maid, and what she said, as printed below, under her deformed feet, was totally lacking in originality but not in pretentiousness.

Madame Duhamain turned more pages. Peasants, clumsily drawn, were indulging in conversations such as were never heard in the country.

Suddenly she stopped. Trudon had opened the door.

"What is it?"

"I thought I heard the waiter."

But nobody came upstairs. Downstairs the noise of old Chamblé's billiard balls continued, as he persistently cannoned.

"I expect he had to go to the Gare d'Orléans," Madame Duhamain continued.

"Or to the Gare de Lyon," Trudon retorted, anxious to contradict.

"Oh, in either case, the distance is the same."

"I don't suppose cabs are easy to get in such weather."

"Yes, it's nice weather!"

"What rain!"

"Who would have thought it this morning?"

"It promised to be such a lovely day!"

"Oh, what do I care about a lovely day!" cried Madame Duhamain disgustedly.

"Yes, it certainly is charming."

"Yes, charming," she repeated.

They remained silent. The absurdity of their position, the ruin of their dreams, became worse as they spoke. Each reproached the other with having raised the subject, though neither dared to say so. What they said increased their melancholy. Their

disillusionment now seemed tangible, and they suffered more acutely from it, as if it were a material injury.

Madame Duhamain began again to turn over the pages of the illustrated papers, but they did not grow more interesting. She turned two or three pages at once, without wasting time on any one of them. Her hasty movements caused the little silver ball hanging from a chain attached to her bracelet to rattle at intervals with a sharp noise against the marble-topped table. Trudon listened, in a state of exasperation, to the repetition of this little metallic rattle, which helped to render Madame Duhamain even more antipathetic to him.

How much more desirable those mistresses seemed to him whom he acquired wholesale, sentimental ladies' maids and plump cooks, sent to him like game by his friend Chanousse, who ran an employment agency. The very triviality of his nature served him in such cases. They could understand his jokes, and were less sensitive to the coarseness which he could not restrain; the heaviness of his tender effusions actually never failed to excite them. Yet, sometimes they resisted. He wiped away their tears, struggled to overcome their remorse, and calmed their scruples with jokes and smiles indiscriminately, to such good purpose that, when he had finished, clumsy hands, swollen with chilblains or trembling from alleged modesty, unhooked blouses and untied strings. Coloured petticoats fell and breasts sprang out from

beneath coarse chemises released from the pressure of grey drill corsets.

They were rarely *chic*. Their yellow stockings emerged from heavy-soled boots, and as they reached above the knee they were cheaply held in place by strips of binding-braid. Their underclothing was not sweetly perfumed, and the caresses of their fingers, in spite of glycerine, were rough, they were so consistently spoiled by the acid grease of daily dish-washing, the skin was so hardened by the incessant application of soap.

By chance, some—chiefly ladies' maids—gave him a glimpse of elegance, borrowed from the society women for whom they worked. With them Trudon found the perfumes, the pomades, and the pretensions of high life, but they made little impression on him. He was temperamentally indifferent to delicacy, whether in underclothes or otherwise, and, as he was passionate without passion, he saw in love merely a need easily excited and as easily satisfied. He was prouder of quantity than quality. Once, however, an Englishwoman, who had taught modern languages in various distant countries, resisted him. As she went downstairs, still blushing, she had complained politely to the concierge.

For what did he take her? She requested the concierge to ask the landlord if his house was a brothel.

Explanations followed, at the end of which Trudon was almost ejected by the police. What a damned

prude, with her stories! By a furious association of ideas, Trudon confounded her and Madame Duhamain in the same disgust. Respectable women, by Jove! Many thanks! What bores!

"I think someone is stopping here," said Madame Duhamain.

"No," replied Trudon, "it's the omnibus passing."

"Sh!"

"Listen!"

Together they strained their ears. The gas-jet had stopped hissing. In the distance, invisible in the darkness, the belfry of the Deux Moulins rang out. "Seven o'clock," said Trudon, who had counted the strokes.

"Seven o'clock," repeated Madame Duhamain, taking out her watch. "Yes, it is seven o'clock. I hope the day is long enough for you!"

"You don't need to remind me of it," he sighed.

They again fell into silence. Outside, the stifled chiming of bells could be heard in the night; they were so far away that they sounded musical.

"Sh!" cried Trudon, putting his finger to his lips. Madame Duhamain listened.

But the wind had suddenly shifted to another quarter. The chimes could be heard less distinctly, and at intervals, as if they were scattered about in the darkness.

Madame Duhamain was of the opinion that it must be the bells of Saint Sulpice.

"Oh!"

"Yes, and it's a sign of bad weather."

From the window Trudon could hear the hammers of the foundries at Ivry. That was also a sign of rain.

"Oh!"

Then, after a pause, she said in a tone of exasperation:

"This cab will never come."

"Nothing ever comes," Trudon remarked in desperation.

"No, nothing ever comes," Madame Duhamain echoed, as she thought of the eternal flight of her ideals, ever since she was a child.

She did not know what she could do now. She turned over the pile of papers and ran through them again backwards, from the advertisements to the title. Having read and reread them without finding anything new in them, nor experiencing any greater satisfaction, she found the railway time-table which she had hitherto disdained, at the bottom of the pile.

In the midst of various information, advertisements of furnished houses, casinos, seaside resorts and boarding-houses, their pictures and prices elbowing each other, she read long columns of figures, with the names of countries, near and far, which impressed her by their length or the clash of their barbarous syllables. Amongst them all, some happened to strike her as familiar. They were places where some notorious event had occurred, the scene of a pilgrimage or a murder; they had been bereaved by an explosion or the miners had organized a strike there. This interested her. With the help of the pictures

and the descriptions of other places, with the help of her recollections of her childhood spent in a village spread out on both sides of a dusty high road, with the town hall at one end, the gendarmerie in the middle and a little chapel at the opposite end, she tried to imagine the way the houses stood, the appearance of the main street, the whole topography of the place and its environs. What trains went there? And as if she had ever been obliged to go there, she carefully consulted the list of fares, where the prices were divided into three classes, the time of departure and arrival, and she calculated the distances.

Accordingly as she changed from one railway company to another the colour of the paper also changed. In every section, on the first page, there was a map of France with heavily marked lines, from North to South and from East to West, showing a complicated network of lines and branches, with definite ramifications, meeting in incalculable junctions, which gave the impression of an anatomical figure, of a colossal industrial organism, of which Paris was the central organ, from which all the arteries branched, where all channels were emptied, the congested heart on the point of bursting from the dilation of a formidable aneurism.

Trudon got tired of walking up and down; the restricted space in which he moved tired his legs, and the feeling of lassitude which came upon him was worse than after a long tramp. Finally he sat down. In search of gaiety he took up a comic paper, and in

anticipation he smiled at the jokes, puns, riddles, quips and wheezes which he was about to enjoy.

But that day the paper was depressing. It had lost one of its regular contributors, one most justly esteemed, and his portrait, occupying an unusual position on the front page, in a great black frame, showed him looking rather like a sentimental and alcoholic non-commissioned cavalry officer. Around this the obituary exalted his manifold domestic virtues, his acute wit, the secret gentleness of his character, and showed what exquisite candour was hidden beneath this eminently caustic exterior. The number of his children, the name of his dog, and his last address were given. An article of nearly a hundred lines deplored the extinction of such a talent in its finest flowering, perhaps when he was on the eve of extending its scope, transforming it, and asserting himself more effectively than ever. However, he had helped to rear the edifice and had fought the good fight. A champion of the ideal, he had followed no other dictates than those of the heart, the best, after all. Circumstances had not arisen, but if they had, he would probably have fought for liberty at the risk of his life. He was one of the many forward-looking minds, and Victor Hugo had once written to him:

“You represent the commonplace in the zenith of its flight. There are deformities that are an inspiration, and you are one of them. I applaud your folly which is wisdom.”

And now he was dead! The writer of the article, however, found consolation in the thought that this superior soul, this lofty intelligence, would not disappear, but their atoms, infinitely dilated, would return to Mother Nature, and would finally be reborn in various forms, making one with the light of the sun, the song of the birds, and the perfume of the flowers.

As usual, advertisement getting the better of emotion, the panegyrist reminded his readers that this subtle writer had left three priceless works, of varying size: "Thoughts of a Midwife," "The Memoirs of an Enema" and "The Man with the Jujube Ear," a full-sized novel, whose publisher was given.

As one turned the page the mourning-note was lost in an increased flood of imbecilities. Paragraphs in heavy type upheld morality, and writers pompously placed their sawdust brains at the service of the Republic. The events of the week were passed in review, decorated with puns and bespattered with filth. The thinness of a popular actress supplied material for interminable jokes, and the style of certain best-selling authors was parodied in phrases whose apparent good humour concealed treachery. Further on there were stanzas celebrating love and denouncing the clergy; after some sonnets which exalted, in defective rhyme, the spirit of 1789 and springtime in the country, the taking of the Bastille and bucolic dalliance, there came an exchange of tele-

grams so definitely stupid that even Trudon's mind could not grasp them.

The dominating figure, however, with a gravity a hundred times more comical than the sixteen pages of laborious pleasantries, was the Editor-in-Chief, an embittered patriot, pouring out his complaints and demanding justice. He wanted to have his civil and political rights restored, having been deprived of them by the courts because of an article judged to be subversive of public morals. In proof of his contentions he cited opinions, talked of Rabelais and quoted the newspaper which was regarded as authoritative in such matters, and begged to be placed in possession of his electoral rights.

Trudon thought these should be restored to him. What was wrong with the Government? After all, the man was in the tradition of Rabelais! That was the way liberty was always betrayed. He was almost on the point of denouncing the Republic when the waiter entered.

This time neither Madame Duhamain nor Trudon had heard him coming, they were so completely absorbed by their own thoughts. The cab was waiting outside.

"All right," said Trudon. "Give me the bill."

When the waiter had gone downstairs again:

"Where are we going?" asked Madame Duhamain.

"Wherever you like."

"Wherever *you* like."

"I don't care."

"Neither do I."

However, Trudon suggested that they should take a turn in the Champs Elysées.

"Thank you! Under no circumstances."

"Well, then, where?"

Suddenly Madame Duhamain thought of an idea. This was it. They would go to Charenton. There she would take the train, return to Paris, and from the Gare de Lyon she would go up the Rue de Châlons, the Rue de Rambouillet on the left, the Avenue Daumesnil on the right, and reach home. It would look as if she had come from town, and no suspicions would be aroused in the neighbourhood. Trudon could make his way home himself, and nobody would be any the wiser.

"Let us go to Charenton, then."

Very well, she would go and put on her hat. She stood before the mirror, smiling, her face framed by her elbows, while her hands tied her veil at the back of her head. Trudon looked at her in amazement; he could not recognize her. Her face had changed. The features were the same, but her expression had become one of indifference and it did not excite in him the same pleasure, although it did not arouse a feeling of disgust. He did not even think her ugly. But how far removed was the Madame Duhamain reflected in the glass from the one whose delicate perfume had filled the staircase and who had left him for three weeks troubled by a deep regret and a great desire. Nor was she the Madame Duhamain whom he had met in the Salon des Familles, waltzing

madly, with languorous eyes and artificial flowers in her hair, dancing to the measures of the polka. He had to make a special effort to recall just how she was dressed and what particular charm she had that evening.

"Will you help me, please?"

She asked Trudon to be so kind as to help her to put on her coat. He did so, lifting her curls clumsily with his left hand, while he delicately raised the collar with his right.

"Thanks. That will do."

While she was tying the tapes around her waist, Trudon again wondered if that was the Madame Duhamain for whom he had waited in the morning. Was she like that when she had appeared against the sunny background of the boulevard and he had hastened towards her? Was she wearing a brown felt hat in which a bunch of tea roses trembled? Did she smile thus beneath her tulle veil of shiny black, sown here and there with tiny gold spots? So this was really how she looked in that confection of military cut, covered with an infinite series of braided arabesques? He felt no desire now as he looked at the same woman in the same costume, and he could not understand how, a few hours earlier, the rustle of her petticoats as she walked could have given him the illusion that her whole being sang.

What we love in a woman is what we see in her the first moment we meet her, something that will be gone to-morrow or the next day, a moment later, when she has become our wife or mistress, or more

quickly, once we have spoken to her. The irremediable sadness of all love affairs lies in this elusiveness which the lovers themselves cannot understand. Their faces are unfamiliar to each other before their interests diverge, and there would soon be a break if they were not afraid of the unknown ahead of them, if they were not held by the cowardice that springs from habit.

"Here is the waiter."

He brought the bill on a plate and went out.

"How much is it?" asked Madame Duhamain, dipping her finger-tips into a glass of water.

"It doesn't matter," Trudon protested.

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. This is mine."

"No. Certainly not."

Having blown into her yellow suède gloves, she was drawing them on, with a gentle, steady pressure, stopping from time to time.

Seriously, she wanted to pay her share of the expenses.

"Never in the world!"

"Yes."

"No."

Then, in softer tones, as if she were settling something on which they had already agreed:

"Come, joking apart, how much do I owe you?"

The glove on her left hand was already buttoned. She stooped forward and tried to read the total on the bill. But Trudon intercepted her. He seized the piece of paper covered with figures, ornamented

with a lithograph of Les Marronniers, and tore it into pieces, rolling each into a ball. He felt tempted, as a joke, to throw them at Madame Duhamain's head, but restrained the impulse, contenting himself with a superior laugh.

"So you won't let me?"

"Why do you insist?"

"Really, you are most unreasonable."

She was trying to put on her other glove, but without much success. As a species of friendliness had been engendered by this indifferent exchange of questions and answers, she said:

"Look, I can't do it. Button it for me."

He laboured for some time in vain. The soft kid slipped away from the rather worn buttonhole.

"Do you want a hair-pin?"

No, he could manage without that. He flattered himself on his skill, and while he tried to catch the button which eluded the grasp of his broken nails, Trudon reflected. What a fool he was! For all the fun he had got out of it, Madame Duhamain might just as well pay her share, since she wanted to do so. Nevertheless, he hesitated, held in check by inescapable traditions, the conventional notion which demands that the men shall always pay when there are women.

"Leave it like that. It is all right," said Madame Duhamain.

The last buttonhole near the top was gaping open, showing the too plump arm, reddened by the struggle.

Trudon noticed that this nude glimpse did not excite him in the least. He had even thought her arms were better-shaped. Madame Duhamain was preparing to go downstairs.

"I shall pay when I go down, you know."

"As you like. But they won't take your money."

"We shall see."

"I have an account here," retorted Trudon, looking at his cheek in the glass.

Madame Duhamain had gone. With one hand she held her skirt, and with the other she really fumbled for her purse, into which, as a precautionary measure, she had that morning put forty francs, in two gold pieces, the result of secret economies of which her husband knew nothing, her personal profit on the household expenses, which she called by the childish name of "my savings box." But as she went down the twenty steps, she reflected: Why should she be so anxious to share the expense? It would be absurd and he would laugh at her. Women never had anything to do with such matters. No. Really, it would be too stupid! She smiled a little as she remembered the acrobats at the fairs who used to announce: "Ladies and gentlemen will pay on leaving, but only if they are satisfied with the performance." Well, she was not satisfied. She would leave without paying a cent; that was all! However, she did go up to the lady at the cash desk, and whispered in her ear:

"Of course, Madame. Come with me," she said,

putting her embroidery down in the chair. And they both disappeared down the corridor.

"Well, if you get that stroke, I'm done for," shouted Trudon from the middle of the staircase, to old Chamblé, who was setting the balls in the most difficult positions, and still trying new shots. The balls rolled, but he missed the cannon.

"I thought you wouldn't," said Trudon triumphantly, taking the cue from his hand. "Try it like this. Hit the first ball a little to the right, then the red half full, with plenty of left side."

He steadied his hand. There was a sharp noise like a twig snapping. He had mis-cued.

"Ah, you're damned smart, aren't you?" sneered old Chamblé. Then, with great familiarity, he asked Trudon if he always was like that, if he had also missed his stroke upstairs in the private room.

Trudon was mad, and did not pretend to notice this obscene joke. He was profuse in his apologies, and accused in turn the tip of the cue for being loose, and the chalk because it would not stay on. His cue had been spoiled, otherwise . . .

"It wouldn't have happened, I suppose," the proprietor retorted, continuing to give a smutty significance to the most ordinary terms.

"Anyhow, I am not in good form."

"Of course. You can't eat your cake and have it."

"You devil!" said Trudon.

"You devil!" repeated old Chamblé, as they dug each other in the ribs.

But Trudon was looking anxiously about him.

"Where is . . . ?"

"Are you looking for the skirt?" asked Massucot, who had come up from the cellar with the cat, and was taking bottles from a basket and setting them out on the table, one by one. "I think she's gone out to relieve herself."

The entire staff concurred in this opinion.

Trudon made no reply. He was indignant. He could not pardon women for publicly satisfying needs which he regarded as vulgar and entirely destructive of romance. He saw fine shades in physiology and hierarchies in the animal functions. Certain physical needs seemed to him superior and noble, tending towards the ideal and inspiring great deeds. He cultivated these, spending a great deal of time and cunning, at the cost of his health, in provoking them, while others, no less animal, were hideous and repulsive to him. Consequently, at this moment Madame Duhamain fell further in his estimation, and became more remote from his desires, as if all her charms were swept suddenly away by this stream of natural amonia. However, abandoning his sense of dignity, he rejoiced. Since that was the way, he would go and do the same.

"Put it all down on my bill," he said to old Chamblé, pointing grandly to the private room, thereby giving him to understand that he would pay the entire expenses of the day. Then, in his turn, he

followed the direction down a corridor indicated by the outstretched forefinger of a hand painted on the wall, and came to a door on which was written in irregular letters: "Here it is." He entered.

When he returned, his shining shoes were bespattered by little drops. Old Chamblé had left the billiard table and was making entries in his ledger.

"How much is it?"

The proprietor gave him the total.

"All right. I'll settle at the end of the month."

The other professed no anxiety and flattered him by expressing the wish that all his customers were like Trudon.

Having nothing to do, Trudon was rolling the billiard balls around the table. He was just going to do some stunts with two cues placed parallel when Madame Duhamain at last appeared.

"Well, are we right?"

He answered.

"Right."

The staff of the restaurant saluted. Even Masucot took the trouble to open the door, and they saw the cab waiting outside. The rain was beating down upon it in a continuous stream, and the wheels were sunk in the water of the swollen gutter almost to the axle.

"Where to, boss?"

"Charenton."

The driver began to grumble. It had never dawned on him that one could go anywhere from Bercy except to Paris, and he had taken the precau-

tion of turning the horse's head in the direction of Notre Dame. He tried to turn the cab around, and it became a great adventure. Trudon and Madame Duhamain had to wait on the door-step splashed by the rain.

"Hurry up. The weather is awful."

Trudon's hat was almost blown away and there was water in the artificial flowers of Madame Duhamain's bonnet.

"Well, get in. I'll manage somehow," said the driver. The wood had swollen from the damp and the door was jammed. Trudon put a handkerchief over his hat, went round the back of the cab, and tried to open the door on the other side.

"That one opens," said the driver, jumping down from his seat.

"There you are. All it needs is a little patience."

Trudon had got in and Madame Duhamain took her seat on his right.

"Where do you want to stop?"

"Drive right on. We'll tell you."

The driver winked knowingly. He thought he understood. Climbing into the box seat, he took the reins in his hands. The lash of his whip cracked in the damp air, and the cab set out into the rainy night, illuminated by the yellow light of its two lanterns.

PART FIVE

PART FIVE

THE old-fashioned cab moved laboriously along the quay, its broken springs groaning under the burden of twenty-five years of wedding-parties, lovers and luggage. It jolted them through a series of puddles in which the reflection of the street lamps was like a shimmering cloth of light. Following the road which was a stream, it passed the Restaurant du Sapeur, the Rocher de Cancale, the Cour Boutet de l'Isle, with its house in the background behind the railings, and its tall trees whose shadows were lost in the darkness. It passed the Grandremy Printing-Works, with its flight of steep steps, the Cour Valentin, and further on, to the right, opposite the Rue Gallois, the post where a Paris guard is always on duty, walking up and down, and the bell, raised on a lofty beam, which at regular intervals rings out the hour to the workers at the port, shaking the little mound on which it stands.

Inside the carriage Trudon and Madame Duhamain did not speak.

In due course they passed the railings in front of the Navigation Office, the Cour du Petit-Château, then Julien's restaurant where on Wednesdays, during the summer, boating-parties, invisible because of the trellises, dance to the sound of loud music that

can be heard above the clinking of the glasses, the smutty jokes and the strident laughter of stupid women. It was on such days that Madame Duhamain used to take a walk in the neighbourhood with her husband by way of entertainment. Taking his arm, she would walk back and forth, shouldering the concierges and hustled by the playing street urchins, and she would complain of the noise of the buses which sometimes drowned the tender melodies of the soloists. She always cherished the ambition of hearing the last piece. It was generally believed to be the best. But she would be overcome by fatigue, exhausted by the gaieties that were taking place behind the shutters, and she would lean against their brick ledges, silent and dreamy. At eleven o'clock, with lanterns and music, the crews would start homewards, presenting the fairylike spectacle of a Venetian fête beneath the stars. It was here that her wayward imagination had first begun to wander. Here she had surrendered to many a desire for the impossible, seriously longing to be carried off, amidst the fanfares, in the arms of a lover. And all those dreams had now culminated in this deserted quay, while the Seine flowed by from one bridge to another as monotonous and grey as her own life.

The dampness rose from the soaking ground and penetrated the mat thrown upon the rickety floor of the cab. To fight the cold, Madame Duhamain kept moving her feet in her cloth boots. Trudon was lost in his memories and was oblivious of everything. He had eaten and drunk in all these estab-

lishments and knew their owners and head waiters. Every day he played cards with them and discussed prices in all the neighbouring cafés. Certain places reminded him of details. He remembered the lines painted on the walls to show how high the river had risen during the last inundation; a good stroke of business which he had concluded; a lucky hand at cards; an argument about a tear in the billiard cloth; the alleged adulteries of the lady at the cash desk.

The Rue Solanges, where the buses stopped, the Cour Beaudoin, in the shadow of its porch, Binet's, the tarpaulin-manufacturer's, appeared and disappeared in turn. Trudon recognized the Rue d'Orléans by its lights; then came the Cour Cabanis and the yards of the Macon wine-merchants. The names of the owners gradually recurred to him, filling his mind with recollections of deals concluded and with business problems. Monday was already looming up at this advanced hour and the bedraggled tail-end of Sunday suggested the fatigue of the workaday world. He began to think of accounts, of bills backed, of drafts accepted. He had been told of a good commission and perhaps he would be in time to get it from Mathieu and Company, wine and spirit-merchants, whose premises he could now see on the ground floor of an eighteenth-century country-house at the corner of the Rue Nicolai. The cab rumbled on. To the right, Madame Duhamain could see some trees rising behind a wooden shed. In the background the Seine flowed with that crepuscular light which water assumes in the dark. Where was

she? She wanted to know, so she turned round and raised the cloth flap which covered the little window in the back of the cab.

The quay looked like an immense curve of light in the night. In the distance she saw the fleeting red light of a lantern on the back of an omnibus beside the conductor. Not a soul could be seen. With a monotonous noise the rain hammered ceaselessly on the roof of the cab. Madame Duhamain listened to its falling. Soon the ringing of chimes could be heard above the splash of the water. It was the bells of Saint Sulpice. For a second the sound entered through the little broken pane and filled the cab with the last chimes of Sunday. Gradually the sound grew fainter, fading away. Madame Duhamain strained her ears, there was still a stifled echo. The cab rattled noisily under the Pont National. Then it suddenly slowed down, crossed a patch of light, and resumed a more rapid pace along an even darker road. Through the damp curtain of mist which the heat had spread over the windows, Madame Duhamain vaguely recognized the fortifications. They had crossed the city boundary. Now the bells were silent beneath the teeming sky. But in the continual noise of the wheels, in the vibration of the panes insecurely held by crumbling putty, Madame Duhamain heard a kind of music.

Uncertain rhythms insensibly fell into a definite beat and wild airs underwent a change and ended as familiar tunes. Songs she had casually heard,

and which she thought she had forgotten, gradually mingled with the fleeting memory of the tinkling bells. In the symphony of many subjects developed by the motion of the cab, one motive dominated, the languorous waltz which was played when, trembling with desire and longing for the surprises of the unknown and the ideal initiation into the delights of adultery, she had abandoned herself in Trudon's arms, and he had finally kissed her shoulder amidst the gaieties of the Salon des Familles. That was only three days ago, but in that sudden lengthening of perspective which boredom produces she began to believe that it had all happened a long time ago, in the distant past. How banal her aspirations now seemed! What a fool and an idiot she was! The loss of respect for her own intelligence seemed to increase the melancholy of the rainy night and add to the existing dreariness of the landscape.

Empty spaces stretched out around them. Here and there, one could see the white splotch made by a signboard, "To let," with particulars as to areas and the address of the agents. A lone dwelling-house then appeared, with balconies resting on twisted supports, with lighted windows behind. Then came the framework of a doorway, opening on to scaffolding and leading to dwellings in the course of construction, which looked like ruins from a distance. One after the other, trees whose trunks alone were visible appeared and disappeared. She tried to count them. The hooting of a siren could be heard at intervals, and a steamboat passed along the Seine, the reflec-

tion of its red lights trailing in the foaming wake of its screw. This spectacle absorbed her attention, but when the trees again began to file past she resumed her count without ever reaching any total.

People were passing along the path overlooking the river bank, hurrying along in mackintoshes with raised umbrellas, belated pedestrians who could find no room in the buses, and sailors getting back to their boats at the moorings. About these inoffensive shadows Madame Duhamain wove the stories of crimes related in the press, armed attacks, all the outrages that take place under the shadow of night and are brought to light in the courts. These people were probably lying in wait to commit some outrage. She shuddered, seized by one of those fits of unreasoning fear, by those oppressive thoughts which people feel, in spite of themselves, when they are alone in some deserted place whose very quietness is full of threats.

For the first time since they had got into the cab, Trudon spoke.

"So we are going to separate?"

The sound of his voice was a relief to Madame Duhamain. There was someone with her; she was no longer afraid. Nevertheless, she did not reply. The word "separate" aroused in her heart a sense of boundless sorrow. By the mere fact that it was drawing to a close, this day of disillusionment suddenly took on an unexpected interest for her. In spite of herself, by one of those inexplicable impulses, out of that inertia produced by great fatigue,

she felt a strange, listless attraction towards Trudon. She no longer wanted him to go away. She assuredly did not love him; she still found him stupid, foolish and intolerable; the idea that she might have become his mistress seemed to her monstrous. Yet, the presence of this man, towards whom she felt so indifferent, did give her a kind of satisfaction which she involuntarily enjoyed.

She experienced that irrational tenderness which one has towards insignificant things. As a young girl she remembered having cried when the head mistress took it into her head to change her place in the classroom, or her bed in the dormitory. She hated leaving her old books for new ones. Later, in her own household, when she was a grown-up woman, out of this worship for old things, this habit of never giving up objects familiar to her hand or eye, she used to keep for a long time, in a trunk or in the garret, old hats and curtains, worn-out dresses and ancient pieces of oilcloth, as if these had acquired by constant daily use something of her own personality, of her own heart. Sometimes this deep need of love, repressed by the pedantic stiffness of Duhamain, overflowed without her knowing it, and enveloped people whom she did not know. The most commonplace circumstances were sufficient to provoke in her a painful outburst of feeling.

One day at home she suddenly noticed that the shutters were closed on the opposite windows on the same floor. She did not know the people who lived there; she had never spoken a word to them, but

she had grown accustomed to seeing the same rugs hanging over the balcony at the same hour, to hearing the same children shouting, the same waltz on the piano. She made inquiries. The concierge, whom she asked as she was buying carrots at the market, gave her full details. Yes, it was believed that they had all gone abroad, to some country with an unpronounceable name. She could not remember it, though she declared it was on the tip of her tongue. But she had it at home, in writing.

"So they will never return?" Madame Duhamain asked.

"No. They will never return."

A fit of melancholy seized her, which lasted a week. Those closed windows in front of her seemed to diminish the horizon, to contract her life, and she had wept alone for a long time, as much upset by this unimportant incident as by an irreparable misfortune.

On this occasion the very presence of Trudon left her with a fragment of hope. All was not definitely over, since, stupid and ill-mannered as he was, he was still with her. . . . The ideal love which she had tried to achieve seemed less remote; through the gross stupidity of the individual she could discern it just as she could see the lights in the distance through the fog. Moreover, now that she had not surrendered, now that she was sure she would not fall, she willingly gave herself up to the pleasure of enjoying sin without the slightest risk of committing it. She felt a childish satisfaction in being out clan-

destinely with a man who was not her husband. She settled herself in her state of beatitude, stretching out on the seat, putting up her legs, straightening her body and sinking her head on her breast, in that favourite attitude of women which seems to make driving more comfortable for them. She did not speak. She was disagreeably affected by the word "separate," which still sounded in her ears, but she could not make out exactly which of her apprehensions was the more painful: the end of the sentimental episode which she had wanted, or the interruption of the physical comfort which she was beginning to enjoy.

The cab gently pursued its course. The driver allowed the horse to go as it pleased, and gazed about him with the contemplative air of a man out driving for his own pleasure, lulled by the noise of the wind whistling through the socket of his whip. From time to time the horse stumbled, and then the reins mechanically tightened, the whip descended upon the dripping oilskin rug, and the cab was shaken by a mighty jolt, until the horse resumed a suitable, regular pace. The driver knew how slowly one should drive to meet the requirements of the couples who used his cab at night. As they went along the Quai des Carrières, he set that easy pace for Trudon and Madame Duhamain which he deemed suitable for the facilitation of idylls and tips. Nevertheless, he was astonished. What a strange idea to use a cab for love-making! It did not appeal to him. It

seemed to him an ineffectual device. He preferred hotel bedrooms, and mentally he expressed a certain contempt for these lovers who so little understood how to combine comfort with sexual pleasure. However, every man to his taste. There is no arguing about such things. Because he did not like it was no reason for trying to dissuade others.

A bus passed and, by way of a joke, or perhaps to relieve his mind, he looked across for his colleague in the dark and pointed to the cab with his whip:

"A nice time is being had by all."

But the bus-driver did not answer, having either failed to understand the joke, or to see anything because of the darkness. All of a sudden the cab was bathed in a flood of light. The foundries at Ivry, on the other side of the river, were flaring in full blast, all the windows were lit up, and the glare, crossing the Seine, made the houses on the opposite hill look as if they were on fire. The driver recognized Conflans, the Sacred Heart Convent and its grounds:

"A nice sight, indeed. There were fine goings-on there in the old days. The papers were full of it."

Then he turned and shouted through the window:

"Where do you want to stop?"

"At Charenton, near the station."

"What? I can't hear you."

Trudon repeated the directions, and as he did so he was surprised at the feeling of sadness which crept over him. The words which he had just spoken announced the end of the great adventure, and he

began to wish that the road would extend beneath the horse's feet to a boundless horizon which they could never reach. Like Madame Duhamain, he, too, enjoyed the presence of a person who was completely indifferent to him. He experienced the same agreeable sensations as on the evening—it was also raining—when a firm with which he did business asked him to take a little English girl to a boarding-school at Pantin, beyond the toll-gate. She was rather afraid of the gentleman and had curled herself up in the corner, blonde and sulky, just as Madame Duhamain had done. Trudon was in the throes of one of those fits of extreme sentimentality, plunged in a state of unexpected and Platonic adoration, to which ladies' men are frequently subject, and he did not dare to touch her. He was filled with respect and kept his hands and speech within the limits of decorum. He gathered that she went once a week alone to the Protestant Church of l'Oratoire, and for some weeks after he went there too. He had submitted to sermons, listened to psalms, and even been present at weddings, heart-broken because he did not see amongst the faithful the slender young girl, with the broad sash around her waist, and his heart used to beat faster when he caught sight of blond hair like hers beneath a hat, as the congregation filed out.

Thus both Trudon and Madame Duhamain, separated by reality, were brought together by a similar expansion of their whole being, by an identical aspiration after inaccessible loves, and the thought of leaving each other was painful not so much because

it meant physical separation as because it put an end to their dreams.

Trudon once more remarked:

"So we are going to separate?"

Madame Duhamain repeated:

"Yes, we are going to separate."

"Why?" he asked.

"We must, dear. It is wiser."

Then Trudon asked the same question which he had put to her in the morning:

"Why did you come if it was only to leave me?"

She replied as she had already done:

"I did not want to keep you waiting for nothing, and I wanted to tell you to stop thinking about me."

They relapsed into silent astonishment at themselves, at the strange echoes awakened by their words in the emptiness of their hearts.

The foundries at Ivry flared more furiously than ever, illuminating the sky with the intense light of an aurora borealis, so that Trudon and Madame Duhamain could see each other in the cab as if it were broad daylight. An anvil resounded with the clear silvery note of a bell beneath the stroke of a hammer. Probably they were going to take the steel out of the furnaces.

Madame Duhamain raised her voice in order to be heard above the noise and continued:

"As a matter of fact, I ought never to have listened to you."

"Oh, don't say that!" cried Trudon.

"You may say what you like. It was really very

wrong of us to do what we have done. At the bottom of your heart I am sure you think less of me."

He shook his head as in sign of disagreement, and she added:

"You don't say anything. I want you to speak. Tell me what you are thinking about."

"About you," Trudon answered.

She stared into his eyes as if to find there some guarantee that he was not deceiving her. He, however, was accustomed to this sort of scrutiny, and his eyes did not betray his secret thoughts. Madame Duhamain was disconcerted and said:

"Is that fib really true?"

Trudon protested. Did she doubt him? He called up memories. Did she not remember the first time he met her? . . .

"On the stairs. . . ."

"I even gave you my hand."

"Yes, to help me up. I was out of breath."

They supplemented each other's recollections, the one completing the other's sentences, and this exchange of talk animated them, somewhat in the way that pieces of dry wood are warmed by rubbing against each other.

"Then," Trudon went on, "you came to my apartment."

"Yes, the day the dirty water overflowed."

These far-off things made them feel sentimental, and the boredom of the day diminished and was forgotten, as though dissolved in the sweetness of their memories. They became tenderly expansive. Then

came the ball; she had lost her slipper; they had waltzed together: later, towards daybreak, he had confessed his love for her. With his old insinuating voice he said:

"I loved you for a long time but I never dared to tell you. Didn't you see it?"

"Oh, you would have acted in just the same way if you had met any other woman."

Behind them a formidable hammering arose from the forges and the noise was so bad that Trudon had to shout:

"No! No! I have never loved any woman as I loved you."

"Never?"

"Never! Never!" he declared emphatically.

Gradually he became excited. Although he had no longer anything to hope from Madame Duhamain, he still showed a desire to convince her, and the loud tone which he had to adopt, because of the noise, made his declaration seem so authoritative that he himself was convinced by his proofs and began to believe his own lies.

She listened, soothed both in body and mind. She enjoyed to the utmost the tribute of admiration which Trudon, employing the same language as on the night of the ball, felt called upon to render to the provocative charms of her body.

"So you think me very beautiful?" she said.

Suddenly Trudon avoided answering her. It had just dawned upon him that all his gallant phrasemaking, this wholesale consumption of sentimental

platitudes, was gradually leading him beyond the limits of what was reasonable. Perhaps another word, another lyrical effusion, and Madame Duhamain would suggest that they should renew their relations. What a bore that would be! Yet how could he refuse? The thing would go on; there would certainly be more rendezvous, more attacks of modesty, more of all this prudish nonsense to which he had had to submit, and other days, all alike, would succeed this one which was nearly over, at last! No. By Jove! He had enough. He nonchalantly rubbed the vapour from the window and they could dimly see the confused outline of houses.

"Hello!" he said. "Here is Les Carrières."

The cab rolled on and on. Along the street the walls stifled the sound of the distant foundries.

"So we are going to separate," Madame Duhamain murmured.

In careless tones he replied:

"Yes, it seems so. And we shall never meet again."

"Well, in any case, you would have forgotten me with the others. I should not have been the first."

Trudon made a gesture of denial, and out of politeness described himself as being utterly miserable at the prospect.

"Nonsense. Why don't you tell me the truth?"

Trudon rapped on the window.

"Here! Here!" he shouted.

The driver stopped the cab. They had arrived.

"Oh!" cried Madame Duhamain.

She got out and, while Trudon was paying the cab-

man, she stood on the curb holding up her skirts and choosing the best way to cross the street. The rain had stopped. As clouds scurried in the wind great gaps of clear sky appeared, glittering with stars. In front of them, at the end of a muddy courtyard, the luminous face of the station clock indicated that it was just eight. In the darkness, from the direction of Maisons-Alfort, a train was whistling.

"Will you take my arm?" said Trudon.

She refused. They walked up the slope to the station, Madame Duhamain in front on tip toe. Trudon, throwing all elegance to the wind, stopped to turn up the ends of his trousers. He had to run in order to catch up with her, just as she was going on to the platform.

"Well, I am off. Good-bye."

"Wait a minute. I'll get you your ticket."

But she would not have it. No. No. Not at all. She would not hear of such a thing, and, in order to demonstrate once and for all that there was nothing between her and this man, she insisted on his allowing her to pay for her own ticket.

"Pay if you like, old dear," said Trudon to himself, for he was now furious at finding that he was definitely shelved, and took a sort of vengeance in this economy.

In the distance the approaching rumble of the train could be heard, a white signal appeared.

"Hurry up, then. Here's your train."

"Good-bye, then," she said, holding out her hand.

Trudon fancied that she was offering herself to

him. For a moment it crossed his mind that he might take her in his arms and kiss her anywhere, anyhow, but he did not dare. Yet he could not bring himself to release her hand. When she disappeared into the station, remembering for the first time that he might compromise her, he did not follow her, but remained standing in the wet yard, and for no reason, unconsciously, he began to walk up and down as he smoked. All at once he felt a desire to see Madame Duhamain again. He stood on his tip toes and looked into the waiting-room. It was empty, so he decided to lean against the railings beside the lines.

The train entered the station.

He heard the guard shouting: "Passengers for Paris," and the word "Charenton! Charenton!" was repeated several times from one end of the train to the other. Nobody got out. He saw the dark outline of a woman being helped into a compartment. That was probably Madame Duhamain. Then the guard's whistle blew, the engine answered, and slowly the train began to move, gliding gently along the rails in the darkness. One by one the lights disappeared. Then Trudon, still leaning against the railings, watched for a long time the three red lanterns hung in a triangle at the end of the last carriage. For a long time also Madame Duhamain leaned out of the window and watched the diminishing spark of Trudon's cigar. When the whole train plunged with a roar into a tunnel, neither of them could see anything more. They were separated, and both felt a

great emptiness, the sadness of boundless melancholy, the melancholy of things irrevocably gone, whose very banality will never occur again. They both regretted that they had not been able to make good use of the opportunity that had been offered. In their excessive concern for the ideal, perhaps, they had missed happiness which neither their will nor the force of circumstances could ever bring back to them. It would have been wise not to resist it but to enjoy it madly, just as it was, without seeking the impossible. They were tired by the very efforts they had made, exhausted by the excess of their unsatisfied desires, and they felt that something within them had definitely thwarted. With dread for the future they discovered that their personal faculties were diminished and their hearts narrowed beyond remedy.

Before leaving, Trudon gazed at the little station soaked by the rain, at the lights on the platform where the incessant tinkling of electric bells could be heard. Then he decided to go up the stairs, and when he had reached the bridge overlooking the railway line he stopped and gazed again. The gas-jets were lowered to save money and, as far as the eye could reach, the rails ran in gleaming parallels. No train was signalled. It seemed to him that Madame Duhamain had gone off into the dark unknown from which one never returns. He listened. The wind stirring the telegraph wires sent up into the black sky an orchestra of moans. He felt utterly alone. The whole world appeared lamentably empty and useless.

He thought of his dead relatives; all the ancient sorrows in his life, aroused by his present sorrows, crowded into his memory. He had never felt so undecided, so stupid, so abandoned, as by the departure of this mistress whom he happened to regret. However:

“What a fool I am to stay here moping! What am I waiting for? After all, what a cheap creature this Duhamain woman is!”

To revive his spirits he marched along the dark street whistling a dance tune and trying to persuade himself that “this wench” had a lover. Well, a nice time he must have with her! He, Trudon, was certainly not the only person on whom she tried her coquetries and hypocritical affectations of modesty. This idea consoled him, and soon his natural good humour triumphed over his melancholy. He felt a desire to spend the rest of the evening more agreeably. He retraced his steps to the station, bought a ticket for Paris, and got into the train. He was thoroughly decided to go to a dance at the Salle Rivoli, the Café de l’Époque or La Vacherie du Château d’Eau, in search of easier conquests with the more immediate satisfactions which materialism procures.

When Madame Duhamain reached home, Duhamain had been back from Juvisy for an hour. He had gone to bed, overcome by the gentle fatigue which comes from a long rainy day. He was reading the newspaper while he waited, lying between the

fine linen sheets on which Madame Duhamain, with laborious coquetry, had embroidered strange heraldic designs, his head on the pillows which her ever wayward imagination had elegantly decorated with lace. Above his head, carefully combed for the night, amidst the dark blue damask curtains, hung a crucifix that looked as if it were carved out of bad margarine. This was an acquisition of Duhamain's, who was one of those Voltairians who secretly respect the religious conventions which they like to see ridiculed every day in the newspapers. Apparently that evening the articles seemed even more emphatic and delightful than usual, for he scarcely returned his wife's kiss and went on reading.

Madame Duhamain took off her hat. She was deeply disturbed, for her escapade aroused in her feelings akin to remorse. She felt in her heart the same anguish and fear as in the morning when she started out to keep her appointment. Several times she looked at herself in the glass to see if nothing of Trudon clung to her, if her face, after this attempt at adultery, did not bear some involuntary trace of passion that might betray her. She feared Duhamain's perspicacity. He had often boasted of his cleverness in front of her. In his opinion one could always read the crime on the face of the criminal: even the intention of evil was visible in the eyes of a guilty person. Madame Duhamain examined her eyes; they had extraordinarily dark rings underneath them, and she was horrified at her tired, drawn features. She walked slowly about the room in her

déshabillé, afraid to speak, she was so upset by the immobility of her husband; she was rendered dumb by the silence. Obviously he had watched her manœuvres, guessed what she was about, and discovered the meeting, and now he was lying there, outwardly calm, but thinking of suitable imprecations, summing up proofs and preparing to take vengeance. How would she explain? What excuse could she offer? Where could she find lies that would sound sincere enough to shake his belief and delay punishment?

From time to time the newspaper made a rustling noise that filled her with terror; she thought it sounded like threats. But Duhamain remained perfectly silent, going from one article to another with the self-possession of a man whom nothing can shock, and whose reading is a continuous expression of his own thoughts.

Gradually Madame Duhamain became convinced that, if her husband said nothing, it was because he had nothing to say. She began to recall various scenes. She could see him in a rage against the charwoman, for he was usually unskilful in concealing his anger when his wishes were crossed. Furious disputes occurred in his office whenever he had complaints to make against the contractors. He never beat about the bush. She felt reassured as she hung up her dress in the press which she reserved for her personal use. When Duhamain had finished reading the newspaper, he spoke:

"Well, how is Caroline Lamblin?"

Madame Duhamain gave a start. This sudden mention of Caroline's name astonished her as much as if it were the name of some person utterly unknown. She was on the point of saying: "I don't know. Why do you ask me?" But she quickly remembered. She had pretended that she was going to pay a visit to Caroline; that she had been invited to dinner, so that she might be free all day that Sunday. In order to gain time and to establish her lie solidly, she answered in the most natural way by a series of questions.

"How is Caroline? Very well, indeed."

"And the school?"

"The school? Why, it was doing excellently."

Duhamain expressed his entire satisfaction. So much the better if things were going well. There were some people who deserved to get on, and Caroline was one of them. She was a decent, hard-working woman, with a heart of gold and the strength of an ox.

"She certainly does work hard," Madame Duhamain hastened to add, "and small thanks she gets for her pains!"

She grew enthusiastic and, impelled by a desire to furnish details which would make more real her story of how she had spent a whole day at Les Batignolles, she invented an English family which had been very satisfied, at first, with Mademoiselle Lamblin and her teaching, but which had finally taken away their three girls.

• A LOVELY DAY •

"Do as one may, it is impossible to please everybody," Duhamain remarked solemnly.

"That is very true."

Then they discussed other aspects of the case: the rudeness of the inspectors, the excellent arrangement of the classes, the difficulty she had in getting her bills paid. Finally Madame Duhamain, afraid that Caroline might contradict her statements one evening when she came to dinner, as was her custom, made a mental decision not to invite her again, at least not for some time. She became preoccupied with the problem of answering imaginary objections to this, and endeavoured to prepare the ground:

"The poor dear! Her work left her so little time."

"We cannot all do as we should like," declared Duhamain.

She was afraid they would see less of her than they had done in the past.

Duhamain agreed. Necessity knows no law. Certain professions seem particularly onerous. Then:

"Aren't you coming to bed, Ernestine?"

Without another word, with imperturbable calm, he took up his newspaper again.

Evidently he suspected nothing. He made no effort to find out anything but simply accepted her statements. They seemed perfectly satisfactory to him; he could not imagine that there was anything behind them! Suddenly new depths of futile imbecility in her adventure of the morning were re-

vealed to Madame Duhamain. The ease with which she had been able to take that tentative step in the direction of the ideal seemed only to emphasize the deplorable mediocrity of the result. What merit could there be in deceiving a man whose mind was so thoroughly at ease that he could not even become suspicious? He, at least, was not troubled by those aspirations after life which disturb one's rest and lead through various terrors to all sorts of trouble. All day long he had simply attended to his business, without a regret or a complaint, free from care or remorse, while she, after the exercise of schemes and stratagems to help the monstrous realization of her dream, had deliberately lowered herself in the eyes of the restaurant-proprietor, the waiter and the lady at the cash desk. She was sure that the cab-driver, at that moment, despised her as Trudon did. In her own estimation she felt degraded, and her husband seemed to her superior and respectable simply because he had no thoughts on the subject whatever.

She was filled with tenderness and regrets which she dared not put into words. She hastened to take off the dress which she had put on that morning with such a delicious thrill, as she strove to make herself more beautiful for the crime, more desirable for the meeting, and she threw it on a chair in disgust, as if she were thereby tearing from her body all criminal desires and ambitions of adultery.

With her dressing-gown came a feeling of compassion and she said tenderly:

"And what about you, dear? Did things go well at Juvisy?"

Without relinquishing his paper, Duhamain condescended to go into details. The house was nearly completed, and the tenants could move in about September. But difficulties had arisen, as the owner did not want to cut down the trees in the garden, which had formerly been a wood, and they partly concealed the front of the house. If the façade could not be seen, why all the loving care that had been lavished upon architectural detail? In the end, his—Duhamain's—opinion had prevailed. They decided to sacrifice all the trees that were in the way, leaving some smaller ones on either side as a sort of framework. That was now agreed upon, and the house would be visible, majestic and imposing, at the end of a bare lawn, with its rock-work corners, its elegant moulding, its central balcony draped in sculptured stone, all open to the glorious light of day.

His client, moreover, was certainly a man of some taste. It was he who decided to name the paths in the kitchen-garden after his children, and the point where they all met around a water barrel would be called Reunion Point. Duhamain found the idea so novel, yet patriarchal, that he really regretted it was not his.

His wife consoled him by saying:

"You can't think of everything."

He repeated:

"No. You can't think of everything."

She added sadly:

"I hope you are not going to let that worry you."

That was all very well, but he was afraid he might be lessened in his client's estimation, and he feared he would be humiliated in the future.

"If I had known, I should have talked it over with you."

She protested that she would never have hit on such an idea.

"Perhaps, old girl."

After a moment's silence:

"Perhaps."

Then he became completely absorbed once more in his newspaper.

Madame Duhamain had listened in astonishment at finding herself so indissolubly bound up with the life of this man who thus associated her with his most futile conceptions and his most incongruous ideas. The picture of Trudon recurred to her mind, and she compared the two men. She could not quite decide which of them was less unpleasant in appearance. Both had the same silly preoccupations, uttered similar platitudes, and became in her eyes like one man. Together they were the quintessence of the commonplace. Such was life!

While she was arranging her hair for the night, in a net through whose meshes her blond curls escaped, she became obscurely aware of certain philosophical reflections. She realized that the heart is sad, not because of the continuous blows of fate, but because of our continual effort to escape from ourselves. The

ideal which we demand as a release is more brutal than the vulgar realities which we try to evade. Unrealized aspirations invariably lead to a more painful awakening, in addition to the dangers, the breaking of old habits, and the fears involved. She also realized what depths of folly are implied by constant rebellion against this law of universal mediocrity which presses upon the world as despotically as the law of gravitation and bends it to its will, and she saw the necessity of staying in one's place and of trying to make oneself as inconspicuous as possible, in order to obviate the risk of adventures, and to provoke as infrequently as possible the disconcerting tricks of destiny.

After all, the boredom from which she suffered was probably not so considerable, and it was indistinguishable from happiness except that she was long accustomed to it. Imagination always aggravated real sadness and, since the reality was always less than the dream, it was best to lie comfortably on a bed of platitudes. That was just as good as to obey her inclination to go in quest of a state from which she would inevitably be pulled back by force. First of all, it meant assured quiet, and then, perhaps, happiness would finally emerge from its very continuity.

The quietness of the bedroom influenced her, and the meditative atmosphere about her seemed to invite renunciation. She now experienced the joy that follows a return from a distant and perilous voyage, when one can enjoy from an arm-chair the closer

horizon of home after the monotony of perspectives seen as the chance of a hotel may dictate. The very ugliness of her furniture consoled her. She discovered a new and seductive charm in the transparent lampshade on which a comic-opera sportsman was depicted blocking a bridge and trying to kiss a milk-maid. She became interested in the pictures symmetrically arranged along the walls and hanging by long cords: French soldiers, framed in uniform cloth, were withstanding the siege of a ruined house and firing their last cartridges; young fauns were embracing laughing and half-dressed nymphs on a swing in the middle of a wood. All these bellicose and sentimental figures called up the memory of good old days, of smiles and kisses. What fun she and Adrien had on their wedding-anniversary, when they exchanged presents and proved their affection by useful gifts which helped to ornament the home!

Madame Duhamain had just taken off her boots and, with her feet in her slippers, she lay back in the arm-chair. Respectability was recapturing her; slowly, as if insensibly absorbing her whole being, Duty claimed her. The blue of the room coloured her soul, a blue which was everywhere in evidence, in the curtains, the carpet, the chairs, and even the bottles on the dressing-table, a monotonous blue, symbolically cool, of a shade appropriate to peaceful households and passions faded by habit. In this languid atmosphere, with the lamp burning low, filling the room with shadows, the family portraits followed her with their eyes, looking more severe in

the half-light. They imposed their example upon her, their submission. Aggressively insignificant, there they were: solemn gentlemen wearing cravats, prudish women with corkscrew curls. Monstrously gilt frames surrounded these faces which life had tamed, two generations of resigned features, in which the last revolts and the last ambitions had finally subsided beneath those louring foreheads. These people had assuredly submitted to everything without ever revealing the wounds to their vanity, the anguish in their hearts. Despairing of ever bettering their condition, they had victoriously resigned themselves to accepting life as it was.

Then, Madame Duhamain got into bed.

The lamp, which had been burning for a long time, was smouldering and blackening the shade. The cold wind of a spring that was sad as autumn roared down the chimney, rattling the tile damper, and at each gust last year's cinders scattered over the floor in grey clouds. Outside, shutters banged against the houses.

"What weather! What weather!" said Duhamain, and he declared that it was a lovely day for ducks.

At that moment the beating of feet was heard on the ceiling, and a tune on the piano, one of those cheap tunes which start in the music halls and are repeated in the streets by people on a spree. It was badly played and without an accompaniment; with one finger, apparently.

"Hello," Duhamain remarked, "Monsieur Trudon has brought home another . . ."

He did not say the word, his reticence giving emphasis to his contempt.

"That's the way he would have treated me," Madame Duhamain thought, and without answering her husband, she said:

"Yes, a lovely day."

Summing up all her regrets, impelled by the unconscious desire to affirm loudly her determination to be faithful in future, she added in a suppliant tone:

"You know, dear, you should not leave me alone so much."

Upstairs at Trudon's the piano had stopped. Steps could no longer be heard. Still impassive, Duhamain folded up his newspaper methodically and put it on the night-table. Then, when he had extinguished the lamp:

"Come, my dear, be reasonable. Business is business."

Without kisses or desires the couple fell gently into slumber, mingling their snores, while the pendulum of the clock, in its brief movement back and forth, filled the darkened room with the incessant beating of monotonous hours.

Such was the adventure, at the memory of which Madame Duhamain smiled ironically, with a sort of sharp pity.

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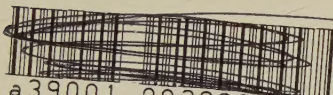
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